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The Washington Monthly

OCTOBER 1988/$3.00

A Chapter from James Fallows' New Book on What Makes America Great

The Next Administration:
The Secret Jobs That Can Make a Real Difference

The Martin Luther King No One Knows
The Man. The Myth. The Pajamas.

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LETTERS

Kids today

Jason DeParle's "The Case Against Kids" [July-August] combined the best and worst of *Washington Monthly* journalism. In an age of pervasive materialism, it is bracing to read a publication that consistently applies a moral test to public and private life. But in the absence of real research, it's hard to escape the conclusion that we're just reading an author writing about himself ("thumbsucking," as we said during my time in journalism).

Today's parents do sometimes succumb to a kind of financial panic that seems, from the outside, unwarranted, and this panic does sometimes permit them to rationalize their own surrender to the grab-and-get eighties zeitgeist. But this panic has economic and political roots.

In the lonely hours of the night, parents ask themselves frightening questions that have nothing to do with Mercedes SLs or Benetton: Where can I find decent child care? What if nothing happens to arrest the slide of our public schools or the tuition inflation in higher education? What if I become disabled or die? What if my child is mentally or physically disabled?

As DeParle writes, he is childless. In the absence of real research—interviews with more than a few carefully selected parents, reading beyond one out-of-date study, social observation based on something besides network TV—he cannot possibly hope to understand the pressures on contemporary parents.

GARRETT EPPS
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

I don't think I've ever seen a more blatantly mislabeled article than "The Case Against Kids." The article made a good case against parents with misguided values, but virtually none against kids.

ARTHUR BRYANT
Washington, D.C.

St. Lowenstein

John Rothchild ["Arbitrageurs Anonymous," July-August] may be right that Louis Lowenstein would rather not be remembered as an acquisitions lawyer, but his analogy with St. Paul ("any more than Paul wanted to be remembered as a fisherman") is way off the mark. Peter, James, and John were the fishermen; Paul was a tentmaker.

BRUCE O. BOSTON
Reston, Virginia

The author replies:
I better get off the ticker tape and back to the Bible.

Losing playground

Those of us trying to expand early childhood education programs for poor children had to be a little flattered by Charles Murray's cynical assessment of our work ["My Favorite Poverty Program," June]. We must be making progress if Murray feels our efforts are worth criticizing. I'll grant him one point: the Perry national program can't be expected to meet its rigorous implementation standards.

But it doesn't have to. Two decades of research have shown that a wide roster of programs can improve the school performance and social expectations of low-income children. Studies have found that Head Start children, like the Perry graduates, have lower rates of grade retention, special education placements, and dropping out than their peers who didn't have a Head Start experience.

What's amazing is how *little* it really takes to make some kind of difference in the lives of poor children. Early childhood education shouldn't be oversold as an answer to poverty, but it has to be part of any antipoverty agenda. And if it doesn't work, we trust that Murray will let us know. I can see it now: *Losing Playground*, the study of Harold Jr. and Young Phyllis, two second-graders who have scammed their way into four years of preschool because it's just more fun than elementary school....

JOAN WALSH
Oakland, California

The case against Babbitt

Your unabashed enthusiasm for Bruce Babbitt ["The Billy Pulpit," July-August] fails to understand the fatal flaw in his abilities. He's brilliant at identifying and understanding problems but inept at implementing solutions. In this sense he's much like Jimmy Carter.

Based on his Arizona experiences as attorney general and governor, he'd probably be a good editor. He'd be tough, demanding, precise, and analytical...but you couldn't rely on him to organize as much as a coffee break, let alone anything more complicated. Reagan is almost the exact opposite: he's the ultimate pacifier and Dr. Feelgood, but he's probably incapable of properly serving a two-course meal—he'd likely start with dessert because it tastes good and leave the main course for some liberal democrats, if not the house cats.

TED RUSHTON
Phoenix, Arizona

Dr. King to you

I read Bill McKibben's breezy and bizarre review [June], and I'm still trying to figure out whether the review was meant as a parody of the headline, "Why Journalists Can't Write About Religion."

McKibben, for example, takes issue with the invocation of Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Rauschenbusch as sources of Martin Luther King's social thought, simplifying King's understanding to the theological notion "that we are all God's children." And yet we know from his

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popular apologetic, *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, that King, who had two advanced degrees in theology, also had a keen intellectual appreciation of both Niebuhr's and Rauschenbusch's social thought.

I believe, therefore, that McKibben's diatribe tells far more about his own religious and theological biases than perhaps he intended.

REGINALD G. BLAXTON
Washington, D.C.

The Reverend Blaxton is the special assistant to the mayor for religious affairs.

The unCOLA

I am writing to praise Matthew Cooper's timely article, "The Saturday Night Massacre" [June], which chronicled the swift dismissal of congressional aide Phillip Longman for courageously calling the Social Security program a "scandal" on CBS's "West 57th Street" because it "pays out most of its benefits to people who are middle class. . . ."

One way to provide both the funding to aid impoverished seniors and also help correct the current inequities of Social Security is to tax as ordinary income the more comfortable elderly's benefits which are in excess of their contributions. The same mechanism could also be used to help pay for affordable long term care insurance to provide good home health services and decent nursing home care.

Furthermore, it is possible that Mr. Levitt (the assertive AARP activist featured on the CBS program along with Phillip Longman) and the more well-off of his extensive constituency might even be willing to forego a portion of their automatic 100 percent cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) if they knew the money saved would benefit the elderly *directly*. One authority estimates that going to 60 percent COLAs would save $150 billion per year by the turn of the century, which would comfortably cover the projected $129 billion yearly cost of nursing home care at that point in time.

THOMAS P. SENTER
Anchorage, Alaska

Behind bars

We write to take exception to erroneous quotes attributed to us by Jay Gourley ["The Specter Initiative," July-August]. While we address specific quotes, this does not imply our endorsement of the remainder of the article.

Gourley's description of the Washington Correction Foundation as "a group of mostly white do-gooders" is of particular concern. In the same paragraph, he quotes Nolan as saying, "Palmer saw all these white faces and got scared." She never made that statement, and the Washington Correction Foundation is a totally interracial body.

Gourley erroneously quotes Robinson as describing the

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RICHARD ARMEY
A Texas professor whose Congress-watching inspired him to run for Congress—and win.

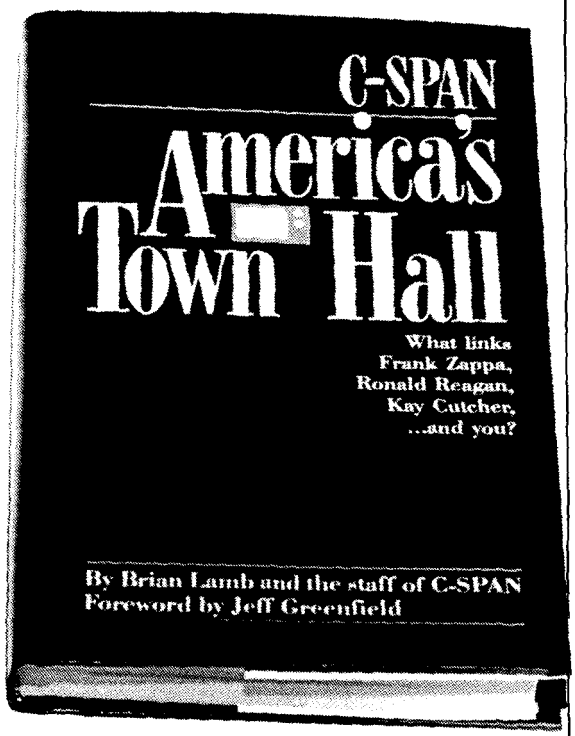
KAY CUTCHER
Joined with others in Sioux City, Iowa, to form the "Sioux City Watchdogs." Her interest in Congress-watching landed her in *People* and on "Donahue."

PHIL DONAHUE
The man who hosts controversial talk shows on AIDS, prostitution, and surrogate motherhood thinks C-SPAN is "the *most exciting show* in town."

JOHN DUNCAN
This 33-year-old high school graduate drove trucks out of Phoenix. His growing interest in the political process, fostered by public affairs television, took him out of the cab of a truck and into a college classroom.

RUSSELL EPPERSON
A prisoner in Missouri who watches C-SPAN in his cell.

98 tales from the newly emerging TV republic



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JOHN PUTKA
A Cincinnati priest who hopes to interest students of the television generation in the political process by having them watch Congress.

RONALD REAGAN
The first president with instantaneous technological access to Congress phones members as he watches them debate.

FRANK ZAPPA
This counter-culture rock musician says he enjoys the "anthropological implications" of public affairs TV.

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procedures by which Dr. Margaret Labat was chosen for her position. He emphatically denies making such a statement. When Dr. Labat took over in 1984, Mr. Robinson was unaware of Dr. Labat or the Initiative.

Gourley refers to our joint letter of March 21, 1988, wherein he states that Robinson and Nolan "did not specifically disavow any of the statements quoted in this article." To the contrary, we disavowed the quotes.

Gourley falsely quotes Nolan with respect to teacher qualifications and inmates' reading levels. Mrs. Nolan was never involved in any evaluation of teachers and had little, if any, knowledge of their qualifications.

Gourley falsely quotes Mrs. Nolan as having "told Specter that he faced a potentially serious embarrassment." Mrs. Nolan has never had the privilege of meeting Senator Specter, much less had a conversation with him.

Mr. Gourley states that Richard Ben-Veniste hired Mr. Robinson, "an old friend. . . ." Gourley obviously intended to leave this remark open for implications of cronyism. The relationship was professional.

Still further, Gourley refers to the one meeting Robinson had with Palmer in Labat's office in September or early October 1984. The quote, "The whites are out to get us," is erroneous. Mr. Palmer said, "The man and those people. . . ," which in the black vernacular, translates to "whites." This particular point was very carefully explained to Gourley.

With a cavalier disregard for facts, Gourley fictionalizes another Robinson quotation: "They [Labat and Palmer] refused to take my advice, so I passed my information on to Richard [Ben-Veniste]." Even in the *Washington Monthly* piece, it is quite clear that Robinson was Ben-Veniste's liaison. Logically, information gathered and data collected by him would have been submitted directly to Mr. Ben-Veniste. It was not Robinson's reponsibility to advise officials of the D.C. Department of Corrections; the advisory committee was formed for that exact purpose.

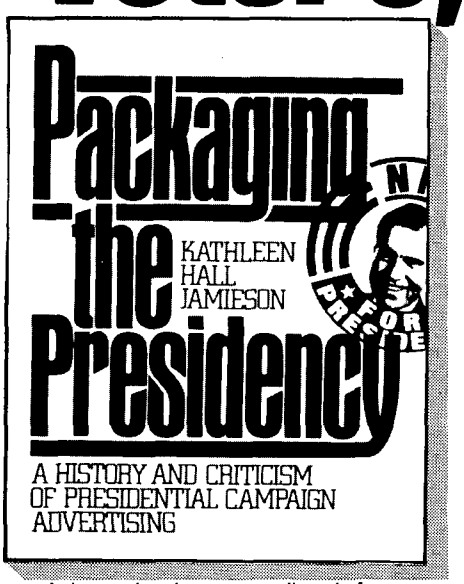
MARGARET CARROLL NOLAN
Washington, D.C.
HUBERT L. ROBINSON
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

The author replies:

Readers should reexamine the article to see if these objections matter. They don't. As far as what was attributed to Nolan and Robinson, the same information is publicly available from other sources and is uncontested so far as I know. Despite what this letter says, both were quoted accurately.

Only one objection is legitimate. Nolan did not tell me she passed information *directly* to Specter. That came from others. I regret the ambiguity. There was also an outright mistake in the article, though it had nothing to do with Nolan or Robinson. I wrote that Labat got supplemental pay that grew to $600 per week. In fact, it was only $300 a week at its highest. The error was mine.

Voters, read this:



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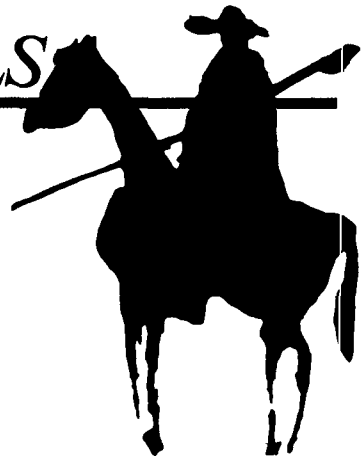
TILTING AT WINDMILLS



"As much as I have empathy for the visually handicapped, I don't believe I can support this," said Alan Lasee, a member of Wisconsin's state senate. Guess what he was talking about? A bill to permit the blind to hunt deer and other game.

"Do we really want people out there shooting guns when they don't know where they're shooting?" the senator asked. His logic, although compelling to me, failed to persuade his colleagues, and the bill passed. If you are planning to travel in rural Wisconsin during the game season this fall, you may derive some comfort from the law's stipulation that the blind hunter must be accompanied by someone who can assist in sighting the weapon. But as I contemplate the possible dialogue between hunter and sighter—"Point it this way, George...over to your right...down a little bit...no, not that far! Well, I guess Rover was getting pretty old anyway"—I think I'll go to Minnesota instead....

At the height of the counter-culture during the late sixties, the hippies came up with a game that delighted me. It was called zen pong, which was ping pong in which the object was not to win but to keep the ball going, back and forth, as long as possible. The challenge to one's skill was still there—but instead of joy through beating the other guy, the pleasure came from cooperative effort. It was, I realized, the way I had always most enjoyed tennis, diving back and forth across the court trying to keep the ball in play and finding the greatest delight in the points that took the longest.

Now I have learned that in recent years the Israelis have adapted the idea to a beach game, with a larger ball, paddles, and no net, but with the same object—cooperative effort to keep the ball in play. I hope their new game sweeps the world. At the very least I hope it influences the way the Israelis approach the Arabs....

Both my father and mother were Democratic politicians, as was I when I was practicing law in West Virginia. So even on my most benignly objective days, a nonpartisan approach to public affairs does not come naturally to me. Quadrennially, in the autumn, my condition worsens with an increasing tendency to find the evil in men's souls rooted in the policies and practices of the GOP. For this reason, I have learned to advise our Republican readers who have prudent regard for their blood pressure to skip this column during the months before an election....

My expression of concern about the Mercedes that can hit 120 miles per hour prompted our readers to tell me, as they so often do in other respects as well, that I don't know the half of it. It seems that BMW has a 12-cylinder model that can do 155 mph. And Corvette plans to offer its ZR-1 that will whoosh by you—pray that it's not into you—at 180. Can you believe that the Department of Transportation allows these vehicles on public roads? Of course you can. It's just good old Republicanism to let the rich individual do what he wants, regardless of the danger to the rest of us....

The Reagan administration has once more failed to support warning labels on alcoholic beverages. As William Drake, the deputy director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, was preparing to testify before a congressional committee in support of such labels, he was overruled by the White House. All the labels would have done was to warn pregnant women not to drink and to advise others that alcohol may increase the danger of hypertension and diseases of the liver and other organs. But again that great Republican faith in individualism triumphed to protect the liquor manufacturers' freedom to endanger all the people they want to.

One would think that their concern about the rights of the unborn would cause conservatives to worry just a little bit about what alcohol does to a baby in the womb....

Denny Harrah was a six-time

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all-pro football player with the Los Angeles Rams. He now lives in my hometown, Charleston, West Virginia, where not long ago he volunteered to help coach a local high school football team. He was told that he couldn't coach because he wasn't "certified."

In Lexington, Kentucky, a Spanish teacher who was found not to have the proper credentials was fired even though, according to the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, "everybody agreed she was doing an above-average job" and her students "scored higher in almost every category" than students from other Spanish teachers' classes.

These are but two recent examples of the way the credential rather than the ability to perform determines the opportunity for talented men and women to function in America today. James Fallows's forthcoming book, from which his article, beginning on page 10 of this issue, is adapted, celebrates the flexibility that has been a unique strength of American life. This flexibility is threatened by new barriers of class and credentialism that have grown up in this century and that have become especially costly to us, economically and spiritually, in the past 25 years or so.

This is a matter that has been a prime concern of this magazine from our earliest issues but that we have had only the most modest success in communicating to people who most need to understand it—the liberal intellectual elite. I hope that Fallows's book is as successful in awakening them to the problem and their responsibility for it as his *National Defense* was in the face of another great concern of the *Monthly*, the liberal elites' post-Vietnam indifference to military effectiveness. . . .

A few months ago Seth Mydans of *The New York Times* reported from Manila that the people who inhabit one of the city's leading slums, Leveriza, "live in tiny hovels that can only be entered on hands and knees." Jason DeParle lived in Leveriza for several months before joining the staff of this magazine. He says that he saw many hovels but *none* that had to be entered on hands and knees. Perhaps Mr. Mydans relied on A.M. Rosenthal as his guide on how to report on the Manila slum. Rosenthal once wrote, "There's not much to see in Leveriza. Fifteen minutes, half an hour, is more than enough time to look around and escape.". . .

Canada has prohibited all forms of cigarette advertising and required that every cigarette pack contain a leaflet with a detailed warning of the dangers of smoking. Why don't we do the same? You guessed it. Because we don't want to interfere with the right of rich tobacco company and newspaper owners to get richer by luring people into addiction with advertising that glamorizes smoking. . . .

George Bush, according to Ronald Reagan's speech to the Republican National Convention, had led a task force that "reduced by an estimated 600 million man years" the burden of paperwork imposed by the federal government on

How many undeserved radar tickets were issued last year?

a) 1,012,317 **b)** 649,119 **c)** 0 **d)** No one knows

Unfortunately, the answer is **d)** No one knows. Over ten million tickets were issued last year. Some experts say up to thirty percent of them were incorrect.

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American citizens. In fact, the paperwork burden—the time you take filling out tax returns and other government forms—under the Reagan administration has grown from 1.47 billion hours in 1980 to 1.88 billion last year. You might also be interested to know that the number of white-collar civilian federal employees has increased by 102,000 under Reagan and Bush.

In 1980 there were 420,000 federal employees in the GS11-13 range, making salaries averaging from $23,000 for the 11s to $33,000 for the 13s. Today there are 500,000 in these grades with average salaries ranging from $31,000 for the 11s to $46,000 for the 13s. And Reagan has recommended that Congress increase those salaries by 4.1 percent in January. . . .

After the disastrous fires in Yellowstone, most people seem to want a return to the old Park Service policy of putting out forest fires as quickly as possible. The "let it burn" policy of recent years is widely derided. Yet it is the natural way and would make at least some sense were it not for the fact that the Park Service's previous no-burn policy—in force for half a century—had left so much "fuel" on the floor of the forest in the form of underbrush and dead, fallen trees and branches that the stage was set for a major conflagration, which this summer's dryness, high winds, and a few sparks combined to produce.

The sad fact is that this accumulation of fuel could have been prevented if the Park Service had followed a policy of "controlled" or "prescribed" burning, which is recommended by many naturalists and practiced by many private ranchers and timber growers in the West. This could have kept the supply of fuel from building up to the dangerous extent it had reached by this summer. What the Park Service did was go from one extreme policy, no-burn, to another, let-it-burn, without considering how the old policy could have created conditions that made strict adherence to the new policy very unwise. . . .

The people who have worked for *The Washington Monthly* usually maintain strong friendships with one another through later life. Our bond, I suspect, is the affection and esteem that come from working hard together in what we believe is a good cause. Recently that bond has been illustrated by the roster of contributors to the campaign of one of our alumni, Phillip Keisling, who is running for the legislature in Oregon. It includes: Timothy Noah, Emily and Jonathan Alter, Mickey Kaus, Jason DeParle, Michael Kinsley, Carol Trueblood, Jonathan Rowe, Deborah and James Fallows, and Beth and Charlie Peters. My son, Christian, has gone out to Oregon to work in Phil's campaign.

People this close usually tend to agree on most matters, and we at the *Monthly* are no exception. But occasionally we do see things differently. Take two recent disagreements of mine with two of my most respected former colleagues, Mickey Kaus and Taylor Branch.

Kaus wrote in a recent issue of *Newsweek* that in the late sixties and early seventies the young antiwar protestors, simply by opposing the war, had done the most effective thing they could do to save the poor blacks and whites who were doing the dying in Vietnam. This ignores the fact that few in the antiwar movement pointed out the class distinction in who was doing the dying and that, if the upper classes had been drafted, their influential parents would have brought the war to an end fast. It is also true that too many of the antiwar protestors chose to demonstrate with flag burning and similar Jerry Rubin-esque gestures that offended millions of moderates who might otherwise have joined the struggle against the war.

My disagreement with Branch is more one of emphasis. His review in this issue (page 39) strongly implies that there was nothing good about our effort in Vietnam. I think there was a point in trying to help the Vietnamese who did not want to live under communism. That there were such people, and a lot of them, has been demonstrated by the tremendous number who have chosen to risk dangerous escape rather than to live under the communists. There were far more of them than the small gang of corrupt officials, Chinese merchants, and Catholic mandarins, whom the American left likes to imagine were the only opponents of the Viet Cong. The weakness of the Viet Cong at the end of the war (by the admission of North

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Vietnamese generals themselves, the Viet Cong played no significant role in the final victory) also suggests that the Viet Cong was not the overwhelmingly popular manifestation of the South Vietnamese sentiment that the left wanted to imagine it was.

Our error in Vietnam was not in wanting to help or in thinking help was needed but in the way we chose to give that help. The mass bombing of nonmilitary targets and the mass deployment of draftees resulted in countless unnecessary deaths. We probably should have done no more than give aid to the South Vietnamese.

If any military action made sense, it would have consisted of no more than a blockade of the North (which was highly effective when we finally used it in 1972, at a cost, by the way, of zero lives) and the kind of guerrilla-antiguerrilla campaign that John Paul Vann spent most of his time advocating. This surely would have saved the lives of the great majority of those who died in the war. And with wise diplomacy that played on the natural hostility of the Chinese toward the Vietnamese, it might have produced a stalemate that would have allowed a noncommunist South Vietnam to continue to exist. That wouldn't have been a bad result.

Would it have been worth the lives it would have cost? That's arguable, but it does show that decent men, not obsessed with a monolithic view of communism and not dedicated to American imperial expansion could have had a point in assisting the South. This is why I think Branch—and Sheehan—are much too niggardly in conceding the possibility of benign or rational motives on the part of at least some of those who wanted to help the South Vietnamese avoid communist rule. . . .

Sometimes readers send me clippings that are not identified as to source or author. One that I wish I could credit is from a columnist, probably in California, who points out that the movie actor whom Dan Quayle resembles is not Robert Redford, but Robert (Bobby) Morse, the star of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. If you recall the film you will know that the similarity is more than physical.

Responsible Senators simply can't believe George Bush selected Dan Quayle. They regard him as an immature lightweight who would rank among the worst presidents in American history. That's why there may be some secret Republican ballots cast for Dukakis by those who know Dan Quayle the best. . . .

The brief flurry of interest in the legalization of dope that occurred last spring seemed to have subsided, if not completely disappeared, during the summer. Perhaps the ABC special in September will revive interest. I hope so, because legalization remains the only answer to ending the terrible wave of crime and corruption that is drowning many cities and even entire nations.

To the people who fear that legalization will lead to an increase in addiction, I say let's at least try it. If it doesn't work, we can make drugs illegal again. But I'm convinced that if we avoid the mistake we made with cigarettes and alcohol and don't permit drugs to be advertised, that if instead we make a major national effort to deglamorize them, legalization will stop the crime and corruption without increasing addiction. It might even decrease addiction by taking away the incentive for the pushers to get their customers hooked.

If you want to know how deglamorization would work, remember the antitobacco TV commercial in which a bunch of Marlboro-type cowhands burst through a saloon door, drew their six-shooters from their holsters, and suddenly doubled over in a spasm of coughing. . . .

If you lived through the fifties, as I did, one scene you'll never forget is the picture of those nine black students walking bravely through that angry mob in Little Rock to enter Central High School. You may be interested to learn, as I was through an article in a new magazine called *American Visions*, what has happened to them since.

Eight went on to college, seven graduated, three got master's degrees, one a Ph.D. Today, they are variously an editor of a computer magazine, a social worker, a farmer, an assistant dean at UCLA, a talk show host, an accountant, an economics teacher, a real estate broker, and a vice president of Shearson Lehman Brothers. I wonder if the whites in that mob did half as well. . . .

—*Charles Peters*

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California Dreamin'

The trip West freed my father from the constraints of class and custom.

by James Fallows

In the summer of 1955, my father took the Greyhound bus from the East Coast to Michigan to buy a new car. He went to the main Ford factory, in Dearborn, and put down $1,800 in cash. He left in a cream-colored Mercury station wagon with wood-look side panels and a streamlined modern shape. Then he drove nonstop back to Philadelphia, where we were waiting for him.

I was five years old that summer, impatient to turn six. There were reports that an antipolio vaccine was almost ready, available any week now. But it hadn't come out, and my mother was always sticking my arms into sweaters on summer evenings, bundling me and my sister and brother in towels the instant we stepped out of our wading pool, waiting and praying for the summer polio season to be over. I was sitting on the porch steps of my grandmother's house, kicking my feet back and forth, listening to my mother and grandmother reassure each other about the fever I'd just had—"I'm sure it's nothing"—when my father appeared, in the car, at the end of the street.

The new car was barely visible through the thick summer foliage of the trees, but as it came into view it looked impossibly glamorous. When he came to the curb I ran out to greet him, he swung me up over his head and back down to the ground, and my sister and I hung onto his hands as we walked into the house. My father had just turned 30, my mother was 27, and they were about to take their three small children off to start a new life.

By now I recognize that the essentials of our story look entirely cliched: upward mobility, a family that suffered reverses during the Depression, the post-war trek west. That they are cliched is the point: my family's story is directly connected to the classic pattern of American mobility.

People are so used to hearing that America is an "open" and "mobile" society that it can be hard to take these concepts seriously, or to imagine that openness really makes a difference in how America functions. But in fact, the constant possibility of changing your luck and starting your life over is the trait that makes America most different from other societies, especially from today's workhorse competitors around the Pacific Rim. Japan has succeeded by organizing people to do their best. Its society is strongest when everyone knows his proper place. America is strongest when people do *not* know their proper place and feel free to invent new roles for themselves. Other societies have ways of holding themselves together that America will always lack—most of all, the sense of racial unity that is so pronounced in Japan and Korea and so inconceivable in the United States. Our unique advantage has been the ability to get surprising results from ordinary people by putting them in situations where old rules and limits don't apply. That's the meaning of immigration, of the frontier, of leaving the farm for the big city, of going to college or night school to make a new start. If Americans lose that sense of possibility and believe that they belong in predictable, limited, class-bound roles, we will have given up what makes us special. We'll have lost the quality that allowed this untraditional society, made of

James Fallows, a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly, *reports for* The Atlantic *from Yokohama, Japan. This article is adapted from his book* More Like Us: An American Plan for American Recovery *to be published by Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.* *©1988 by James Fallows. Reprinted with permission.*

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people from all over the world, to work together and flourish. The importance of American mobility is no mere abstraction to me. It's the meaning of my family's life.

The Old World

After we'd settled in California, my mother always acted as if she'd come from some sort of dignified eastern background, but she'd had a very hard life as a child. Her father, Joseph Mackenzie, owned and managed a small ceramics works in New Jersey, not far from the sign that still says TRENTON MAKES, THE WORLD TAKES. One of her uncles ran a small steel plant, producing its exclusive "Mackenite Metal." One of her maiden aunts was a schoolteacher who had been to France in the 1930s, had a grand piano in her apartment, became a naive fellow-traveler of the Communist party, and always tried to set an example of the high-toned life. My mother's father had graduated from Brown and was a dashing, handsome figure. But he was killed in a car crash in 1930 when he was 29 and my mother was 3. The family business suffered, and my mother was farmed out to relatives and shuffled around from house to house while she grew up. Her mother went through two unhappy marriages and fed the family during the Depression by selling the *Volume Library* encyclopedia door to door. It took a hard-nosed character to talk people into laying out money for encyclopedias during the 1930s. My grandmother thrived in the work and retained her toughness long after the Depression ended. All the children in the family eventually went to college. My mother did well on a competitive examination and won a scholarship to Jackson College, the women's affiliate of Tufts. Both of her brothers finished graduate school, one becoming a veterinarian and the other a successful businessman.

My father's relatives had fewer pretentions but weathered the Depression better. The English branch of the family had come from Lancashire to Pennsylvania sometime in the 19th century, and the German branch—my father's mother and her family—had come over just before World War I. All the relatives lived in the staid suburbs north and west of Philadelphia: Jenkintown, Wyncote, Abington, Willow Grove. My father's grandfather, Josiah Fallows, was a railroad engineer who stayed aboard a locomotive that had been mistracked onto a collision course with a passenger train. He directed the locomotive off the tracks and saved the passengers' lives but not his own. Josiah was the family hero.

His other grandfather, whose last name was Hoerr, opened a restaurant and acquired rental houses soon after arriving from Germany. He prospered, but during the first World War, his daughter—my father's mother—was heckled about her German name and her father's presumed Hun loyalties. That bothered her deeply, in part because she had already become pious; through the rest of her life, she tried hard to set an example of upright, community-minded behavior. In the last conversations I had with her, when she was nearly 90, I had to lie and reassure her that, yes, my wife and I were now raising our children according to all the rock-ribbed, fundamentalist values she believed in.

She married my grandfather when he returned from Tank Corps service in France. He went to work for the Atlantic Refining Company, the predecessor of today's ARCO, becoming a sales representative, and they made it through the Depression more or less undisturbed.

Most of my parents' friends from childhood seemed happy with the life in Pennsylvania, or at least didn't plan to abandon it. On a visit to my grandmother in the 1970s, I saw an item in the paper saying that Pennsylvania led the states in the percentage of current population who'd been born in the state. That is, not many people left, and even fewer moved in. That was certainly the way my parents' hometown looked to me. Most of their grade-school friends were still in the vicinity; so were their children, and so were nearly all of my relatives.

A healthy evasion

My parents were sprung loose by the aftereffects of World War II. My father's older brother left college to serve in the Army engineers during the Battle of the Bulge and then came home to graduate. My father was in high school until 1943 and then went into the Navy's V-12 program, a kind of wartime ROTC that emphasized medical and scientific training. Through the V-12, the Navy offered him a two-year crash course in college-level sciences in return for years of service afterward as a military doctor. He went to Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, usually noticed by the outside world only during college football season, when the Ursinus-vs.-Slippery Rock score was a dependable joke item. The Navy sent him to Harvard Medical School for six months when the war ended, then his father supported him through the next three-and-a-half years. He rejoined the V-12 when the Korean war started, and was sent on six-month or one-year Navy postings to Maryland, Mississippi, California, and finally back to Pennsylvania when he was mustered out of the service. He and my mother were married while he was still in medical school, with half-a-dozen years

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of Navy duty ahead of him. I was born a year later, one month before my mother turned 22. By the time my mother was 25, she had three children.

Because my father doesn't like speculative conversation, I've never asked him about it directly, but I have always believed that the trip we made in 1955, across the country to our new home in California, was the crucial event in his life. Becoming a doctor, which the war made possible, eventually gave him more financial freedom than anybody else in his family. But the simple change of scene, which took him away from his roots, seemed to provide a more important, more sweeping kind of freedom.

Southern Californians spend a lot of time congratulating themselves on the good weather. From September through May each year, the local TV news usually shows film clips of blizzards in Chicago or floods in Tennessee to remind the viewers of how lucky they are to look forward to another sunny day, high in the 80s. During the two-week buildup to each year's Rose Bowl game, California's weather *schadenfreude* gets entirely out of control. The visiting Big Ten team is always from some ice-bound Siberia of the Midwest, so the *Los Angeles Times* runs feature after feature about the Ohio farm boys or Detroit urban toughs who are amazed to be sitting outside in shorts on Christmas day.

I'm sure this attitude seems childish to outsiders, and it is; but it also reflects something deep in the culture that is not so absurd. When you live without a winter, you give up the timeless rhythm of the seasons and similar qualities that Easterners think they value, but you gain freedom. You don't have to put up the storm windows or get out the heavy clothes or dig out from the fall leaves or put away your basketball and tennis racket or *stop doing what you want* just because the seasons have changed. You are freer simply because decisions that were previously nature's to make are now yours. Because I could barely remember what a winter with snow was like, I never felt the difference as passionately as my father did, at least not until I went East to college. But I remember how cheerful he was when he headed out to ride his bicycle or play tennis or drive his showy white Ford convertible with the top down in January. It was a fantasy life, an evasion of reality, but in a healthy, invigorating way. My father, like many other people who'd come to California, felt that he had more months of each year, and therefore more years in his life, to use as he chose.

New arrivals, like my father, paid such attention to the weather because it stood for many other kinds of freedom they felt that they'd found in California. People who'd been born and raised there didn't go on and on about the climate; they took it for granted. I know that hard-boiled New Yorkers often view the balmy California weather, and the Californians' obsession with the weather, as signs that West Coast life is soft at the core. Maybe they're right about some of the natives, but I think that people like my father, who'd deliberately come to California, never felt for a moment that the gentle climate was an excuse to slack off. It let him do *more*, not less, and in that way it represented the general license he'd earned, by moving west, to invent a new life for himself.

'Hard a-lee!'

I keep saying "my father" because he was responsible for the move, back in those days of one-career families, and because my mother always had more complicated feelings about leaving the East. On the last leg of our five-day, cross-country drive in the station wagon, the three children constantly squabbling and everyone red-faced from the 100-degree heat of the Mojave desert, we roared along Route 66 to the town of Redlands, which was henceforth to be our home. The town, which then had about 20,000 people and has grown now to more than 50,000 (because stories like ours keep being repeated), lies on the edge of the desert, at the foot of imposing mountains that keep rain clouds, such as they are, from moving further inland. Compared to other nearby towns, like Fontana and San Bernardino, Redlands considered itself elegant, since wealthy eastern asthmatics and tuberculars had moved there at the turn of the century and built a few grand houses and planted stately trees. In those days the city's principal business was orange-growing, and as we drove in we passed row after row of lovely, glossily dark-leaved trees. But the greenery was strictly confined to irrigated areas. This was still the desert's edge, where six months can pass without any rain, where without irrigation nothing but thorns and cactus will grow.

On the outskirts of Redlands, the car rolled across a "wash," a sandy river bed a hundred yards wide that for two or three weeks each decade holds a river. When my mother looked at the blasted grey hillsides and the tumbleweed growth, she thought of Philadelphia's lush Wissahickon Drive, and she broke into tears. That was more than 30 years ago, but when people ask where she is from, she still says "Philadelphia." She found the most East Coast-like house in town and made it look like something from Chestnut Hill. She kept the shutters closed, filled the house with antique furniture, and always dressed in heavy tweeds and scarves once my parents could

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America's unique advantage has been the ability to get surprising results from ordinary people by putting them in situations where old rules and limits don't apply.

afford to have the house air-conditioned, which was after I moved away.

That is, my mother did not value the "freedom" of California as highly as my father did, at least not consciously. On the freedom-versus-tradition issue my heart was with my father. To my mother, moving to California from Philadelphia meant saying goodbye to the old houses and the leafy parks and the established social gradations whose complexities made life so interesting. To him it meant escaping claustrophobic settings and their offer of a predictable life: the regular canasta games, the neighborhood church, the long Sunday afternoons in some aged aunt's parlor, the summer trips to the Poconos or the Jersey Shore. When he was about to leave the Navy, my father asked doctors in Jenkintown and on the Main Line about setting up practice there. Fine—but not right here, was the regular answer. The doctors in California hadn't discouraged him. They planned to grow, there was room.

As it happened, my father re-created many rituals similar to those he left behind—the regular poker game, the Redlands Rotary Club, the summer trips to Newport Beach. But they were rituals he'd chosen himself, rather than just fallen into, which made them seem (at least to me, interpreting his feelings) less confining. And they didn't take up much of his life, whereas the church and the Rotary Club had been the twin pillars of his father's life in Jenkintown. Outside work, in the early morning and late into the night, my father acted as if there was no established niche into which he was supposed to fit, no limit imposed by his background. Because of his rushed war-time education, he'd never taken a college course in liberal arts. He decided to remedy that: for a year or two he studied Greek early in the morning, then Hebrew, then a systematic empire-by-empire course in ancient history, then Shakespeare. When I was in fourth or fifth grade he'd make me get up with him at 6 a.m. and watch "Sunrise Semester" lessons in calculus or Greek. Before my sister and brother and I went to bed, he'd line us up on the couch and take us through the latest set of plates in the Metropolitan Museum's "Introduction to Art" series. To people in New York, who'd actually seen paintings in the Met, this might have looked hopelessly mass-cult. To my father, it was what books were for. He and my mother made their first trip overseas in the early 1970s and visited my sister on her junior-year-abroad in France. My mother, who had studied French, had the educated-American's proper diffidence about her flawed accent. My father plunged right ahead, phrase book in hand, putting sentences together mechanically and making huffy Frenchmen tell him what he wanted to know. When I was 13, he took me and my brother sailing, without informing us he didn't know how. He rented a 16-foot sloop, put us in the bow, and sat at the tiller, "Beginner's Guide to Sailing" open on his lap. "Ready to come about," he'd read from page 39. Then he'd flip to page 40, push the tiller, and read, "Hard a-lee!" He wanted to become a sculptor, took lessons, and eventually displayed his work in a show. He had never been on a horse before age 40 but became captain of a horseback search-and-rescue team by the time he was 50. He couldn't be abashed by anyone who was supposed to be an intellectual or upper-class because he thought he could learn to do anything if he tried. He was the original autodidact.

When I was growing up in Redlands, I'd hear people talking quite sincerely about the "Good Life" in California. Since the time I went away to college, I've heard the phrase used only facetiously. I'm aware of all the reasons for skepticism about California or America's Good Life. But I don't use the terms mockingly myself, because I know what the sense of wide-open possibility meant to my father.

In talking about possibility, I'm mainly trying to describe an idea, not a place. True, there are some

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objective differences between California and Pennsylvania, between the West Coast and the East, that affect their openness to new people with new plans. It's been a long time since anyone thought of Pennsylvania as part of the American frontier or talked about the "Pennsylvania Dream." The weather is different, the ethnic balance is different, the public/private balance is different. Many of the prettiest places in California and the rest of the West are public, open to anyone—beaches, mountains, lakes, redwood forests, houses designed to be seen from the street. None or next-to-none of the coastline is carved up into the private beach clubs that are more common in the East.

The inland empire

Still, what I want to emphasize is the change in my father's heart, not the physical surroundings. He *felt* much freer after our family moved west, and he lived a fuller life than he thought would be open to him if he'd stayed at home. (Other people have sought the same opening-up through a move in the opposite direction. The big city, east or west, has always been the promised land of opportunity for people stifled in small towns. As adults, one sister settled in Boston, I in Washington, my brother in New York. For what each of us wanted to do, the old, crowded, east coast cities offered more opportunity and freedom than California did. Even my youngest sister, born after the move to California, ended up in San Francisco, the most traditional, staid part of the state.)

In moving to California, then, my parents revealed a little about the West Coast and something more about themselves. But they also illustrated the American characteristic that has applied in all regions of the country and through our history. That is the belief that people can learn to do things they've never done, can take on identities they've never had, can will themselves into stations in life different from where they were born.

When this side of our national character is discussed in university courses or literary essays, the representative self-defined man is usually someone like Jay Gatsby. I am not trying to praise Gatsby, or Ivan Boesky (who used to brag that he slept only four hours per night and used the extra time to become a Shakespeare expert), or John DeLorean, or Sammy Glick, or anyone else who pretends to be something he is not. Driving to a new state or learning a new activity is not, by itself, a solution to any problem. But I know that my parents' life was transformed when they put themselves in a different setting and learned that they had new choices. Even my mother now concedes that she is glad they came west.

I lived for only 11 years in California. I left for college in 1966 and have never been back except to visit my parents. But I still say I am "from Southern California," and I believe it, because moving there was the decisive experience in my family's life and in my sense of how people could change their luck.

And there *was* something different about the place itself, which made it more "American" in the sense of encouraging opportunity.

Ten years after my family migrated, the writer Joan Didion, whose family had been in the Central Valley of California for several generations, described the same landscape my parents found. In one of the famous magazine pieces she was writing in the 1960s, she had this to say about Redlands and the similar, nearby towns of the San Bernardino Valley, which the Chamber of Commerce preferred to call the "Inland Empire":

"The San Bernardino Valley lies only an hour east of Los Angeles by the San Bernardino Freeway but is in certain ways an alien place: not the coastal California of the subtropical twilights and the soft westerlies off the Pacific but a harsher California, haunted by the Mojave just beyond the mountains, devastated by the hot dry Santa Ana wind that comes down through the passes at 100 miles an hour and whines through the eucalyptus windbreaks and works on the nerves. October is the bad month for the wind, the month when breathing is difficult and the hills blaze up spontaneously. There has been no rain since April. Every voice seems a scream."

That was the lead paragraph in her article in the *Saturday Evening Post*. When I first read it, as a still-active Boy Scout and civic-minded student at Redlands High School, I told myself: "She's just criticizing the scenery. I can stand this." (She did have a point about the winds. When they were bad they would reach beyond the parched San Bernardino Valley toward the coastline, and there they would destroy like a blast from Hell. Still, I thought, this Miss Didion sounded unnecessarily high-strung.)

Then I read further and found the parts that hurt. She described the people who'd moved to the valley and what they found when they got there:

"The Mormons settled this ominous country, and then they abandoned it, but by the time they left, the first orange tree had been planted, and for the next hundred years the San Bernardino Valley would draw a kind of people who imagined they might live among the talismanic fruit and prosper in the dry air, people who brought with them midwestern ways of building and cooking and praying, and who tried to graft those ways upon the land. The graft took

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in curious ways. . . .This is the California where it is easy to Dial-a-Devotion but hard to buy a book. This is the country in which a belief in the literal interpretation of Genesis has slipped imperceptibly into a belief in the literal interpretation of *Double Indemnity*, the country of the teased hair and the Capris and the girls for whom all life's promise comes down to a waltz-length white wedding dress and the birth of a Kimberley or Sherri or Debbi and a Tijuana divorce and a return to hairdressers' school. . . .The future always looks good in the golden land, because no one remembers the past. Here is where the hot wind blows and the old ways do not seem relevant, where the divorce rate is double the national average and where one person in every 38 lives in a trailer. Here is the last stop for all those who came from somewhere else, for all those who drifted away from the cold and the past and the old ways. Here is where they are trying to find a new life style, trying to find it in the only places they know to look: the movies and the newspapers."

I knew how attractive this part of Southern California seemed to people like us, who had come precisely in hope of drifting away from the cold and the past and the old ways. Reading this article, so much more caustic than anything I remembered seeing in the *Saturday Evening Post*, was the first step toward understanding how our life might look from the outside.

Years later, I was ready to concede that Didion might have been right about some of the things she mocked. But I was also ready to make a larger defense of the starting-over life that people like my parents had made for themselves. There was a side to the no-tradition, no-taste Southern California culture that was not contemptible—that was even magnificent—because it went a long way toward freeing people of the constraints of class.

Blue Milk and Harvard Yard

I had a lot of occasions to wonder about the effects of my Southern California background in the months after Didion's article appeared, because I was heading off to college, at Harvard. I had gotten to Harvard the same way my mother got to Tufts and my father got into the Navy's doctor-training program: by scoring well on standardized tests that let me measure up against people from more impressive-seeming schools. I also had the "advantage" of coming from a small, out-of-the-way town on the West Coast, which added to the freshman class's geographical mix. It's easy to overestimate how much of an advantage the small-town background really is. It is a milder version of being black in the era of affirmative action: other things being equal, it gives you an edge, but usually you never reach the point where other things are equal.

At college I soon discovered that things really weren't equal. Despite my father's contagious, self-directed scholarship, I was more ignorant of more things than the hotshots I met from Groton and Dalton and Great Neck South. My high school had no advanced-placement courses; I'd never been out of the country, except to Tijuana; my parents got *Scientific American* and the *Atlantic*, but I'd never heard of the *Partisan Review* or the *New York Review* or even once read *The New York Times*.

In time I recovered. But, mainly because of the contrast between Redlands and Cambridge, I found myself trying to figure out what class I belonged to—and wondering why questions of class seemed so much more powerful in Massachusetts than California. The explanation for this preoccupation, I think, involved something more than the typical eagerness to theorize during the college years.

The class-placement question might not seem all that challenging. My father was a medical doctor; therefore, I was from the professional or upper-middle class. Moreover, my mother had always pumped the children full of a sense of noblesse oblige that had no obvious basis in reality. "With privilege comes responsibility," she would say when my brother or I acted like the common folk by sneaking beer into a high school dance. Perhaps she was carried away by the near coincidence of my birth and that of Prince Charles. Maybe she dreamed up a fancier-seeming heritage for the Mackenzie family to compensate for the real hardship in which she was raised. In any case it was an act of will, more than accurate social observation, to make us think we were among the privileged few.

Since I was born while my father still had internship and residency ahead of him, I absorbed the atmosphere of the scrimping early stage of medical training, which leaves many doctors, though not my father, feeling that they're entitled to rake in everything they can later on. When we made the cross-country drive, we ate sandwiches out of a big box. When my father went to medical meetings in San Francisco, he took a room in the YMCA. When we finally started buying milk from the milkman, it was a cause for celebration, which all the children cheered with heartless mockery. Until that point, when I was in fourth or fifth grade, my mother had mixed a vile, bluish, weak-flavored mixture from powdered milk, trying to convince us that if it was icy cold it tasted fine.

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At college I soon discovered that things really weren't equal. Despite my father's contagious, self-directed scholarship, I was more ignorant of more things than the hotshots I met from Groton and Dalton and Great Neck South.

More important, before I went to college I really hadn't worried whether I was supposed to fit in at any particular level on the social pyramid. I was a teenager and had other things to worry about, but another reason was that the social environment in Redlands did not encourage such speculation.

I remember feeling as if I had crossed some permanent divide the afternoon I first showed up in Harvard Yard. It was not the change in my life that impressed me, it was the change in the surroundings. The narrow road that ran through the Yard was jammed with station wagons and big sedans, belonging to families who had driven their sons to college—like most students from the West Coast, I'd flown out by myself. The looks of the cars, the parents, even the gear being lugged into the dorms suddenly hinted at a vastly greater range of social stations than I'd even guessed existed. Lacrosse sticks, skis, and squash rackets came out of the trunks. Car windows, even then, bore stickers from prep schools. Fathers wearing sweaters and horn-rimmed glasses showed their sons where they'd stayed as freshmen in the Yard, before the war. Mothers greeted friends they'd known for years, from private schools and summer clubs, speaking in accents I'd never heard.

It wasn't that I resented this whole, dense world in which I had no place. On the contrary, I had a perverse pride in what I started to think of as a log-cabin upbringing. The surprise was how settled and permanent it all seemed, how comfortable these families appeared in their social station. Arrival at Harvard, which left me abashed, seemed part of their entitlement.

Hope in a pink jump suit

This takes us back to Joan Didion. Much as it initially galled me to admit it, she had seen something important about the civilization of the Inland Empire. Her characters were pathetic, out of control, because they were carried away by fantasies of becoming something more glamorous than what they really were. They had thought that everything would be better when they drove to California from their midwestern farm town or dreary East Coast home. The central figure in her article was a woman who became caught up in a lurid love triangle, came to think that her husband would never be sufficiently successful, and got rid of him by planting a firebomb in his Volkswagen. Didion introduced her this way: "Of course she came from somewhere else, came off the prairie in search of something she had seen in a movie or heard on the radio, for this is a Southern California story." (The murder trial was by far the most exciting public event of my childhood. The jury found her guilty.)

If the California dream always came true, the typical California story would be like Ronald Reagan's: midwestern boy comes west, escapes troubled childhood, finds happiness and success. But many times the dream didn't come true, Didion said. She was not the first person to make this point—in fact, the California-migration school of literature is generally depressing. Consider *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Day of the Locust*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *The Loved One*. But Didion showed how hard it was for people to stop pretending, stop dreaming, face the reality of cramped, inelegant,

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lower-middle-class lives.

I found myself resisting her portrayal, but not because it was inaccurate. The flight from reality among first-generation Southern Californians could be even deeper than her article showed. The grocery stores were full of old ladies wearing rouge and pink jump suits and batting their eyes at the checkout boys, pretending they were still comely and 25. An elderly patient of my father's had made his house into a shrine to his accordion-playing career; the walls were covered with kinescope photos of his one appearance on the old Jack Paar show, and he kept talking about his big comeback that would happen any day now. One of my high-school classmates became a blackjack dealer in Las Vegas and tried to impress everybody at the tenth class reunion by saying that he knew Wayne Newton *really well*. In junior high school, the desire to slip the bonds of reality was so strong that several of my friends started a club, the members of which promised each other to emigrate to Australia when they were old enough. If things were going wrong even in California, where everything was supposed to be great but where race riots and crime waves kept breaking out, perhaps Australia was the last "unspoiled" place left.

But this escapist view had another side. Southern California would seem to have a higher proportion of dashed hopes than anyplace else in the country, since so many people were yearning for so much. But it has never been described as a depressed or downcast society, precisely because of the fantasies and impermanence that Didion described. You haven't lived Ronald Reagan's life so far, but your life isn't over—who knows what will happen tomorrow? There is always a chance of becoming someone different, finally getting the big break. Reagan himself seemed washed-up when he was in his late forties, when his movie career had peaked and he hadn't yet switched to politics. This, I think, was a part of Reagan's appeal rarely discussed but deeply felt. Even more than Jimmy Carter or Jesse Jackson, Reagan embodied the American promise of a second chance. His example was more impressive since he managed to start over so much later in life.

Precisely because everything and every role was so impermanent, people could avoid being discouraged by circumstances that would depress others. Things could always change. After returning to Los Angeles, a friend of mine from Boston said, "The difference is the car wash. The people could work there without feeling like they'd always work there, so they weren't so angry." Put just that way, it might sound as if he were reporting on oppressed-but-cheerful peasants, but I knew that he meant something more. A kinder term for self-delusion is hope, and there was a hopefulness to the dreary small-town California life that taught many people to expect second and third chances—even if that meant going to Australia as, for our parents, it had once meant going to California.

The orange-packing plant

The idea of an impermanent social structure, in which people could keep trying out new identities, affected the way people carried themselves and dealt with one another. Life was fairer there, more democratic, than it would have been in a setting that taught people not to expect anything different. There were assorted status games and bouts of one-upmanship just like anyplace else, but most people could not display or use permanent marks of class, since nothing seemed to be permanent. Apart from those Mexican-Americans who had not learned standard English and a few very recent arrivals from Pennsylvania or the South, people's accents did not vary. You usually couldn't tell, just by listening or looking, who was going to college and who was going to work at the orange-packing plant.

Starting that first afternoon in Harvard Yard, I realized that in other places you *could* tell. You could see a stranger on the bus or in a coffeeshop, and the *instant he opened his mouth* you knew a lot about his life story. In England, where I went to graduate school, the mouth itself was a giveaway, since, even as teenagers, working-class people had lost a lot of teeth. In Boston you could hear townie accents and "lockjaw" accents and tell someone's fortune without even seeing his face.

The leveling of manners, I still believe, made it easier for people in California to imagine that many possibilities were open to them. You could imagine that no one was so different from anyone else. In reality, people *were* different and had different chances, based mainly on family circumstance. It was always in the cards for the children in my family to go to college, and for some of my friends not to. But even the fiction of equality was useful. By encouraging people to behave as if everyone had a chance, this transient society gave more people more hope. Because it seemed more fair, it *was* more fair—not entirely open to talent and energy, but more than it would have been if people continually had their noses rubbed into the inborn differences in social standing.

I am not ignoring the ugly sides of this transient culture or defending them, in themselves. It is no accident that Southern California is the home of so many wacko religious cults and political movements. Cookie-cutter tract houses, endless shopping malls,

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lives centered on cars and suntans and MTV—these are not necessarily the ideal expressions of the human spirit.

What I do claim about these blemishes on my homeland's complexion is that they were closely connected to its most admirable trait—the sense of possibility—*and that they are America's story in miniature.*

California dreamin'

Outside descriptions of our society have usually stressed a mixture of good and bad similar to what I have tried to describe about Southern California. America has always been vulgar, untraditional, naive, short on refined culture and behavior (these parts to the bad); and (to the good) democratic in its manners, relatively unhampered by class distinctions like those in Europe, more optimistic, readier to change. The two sides, good and bad, were connected: the society was open to so many new people *because* it was relatively unaffected by tradition and the culture that was nursed by tradition. Or maybe the "because" worked the other way—in either case, openness and unculturedness bore a relation to each other. "America has a high standard of living of low average quality," the critic Paul Goodman wrote in *Growing Up Absurd*. That is, America leads the world in the proportion of people who can afford to own cars or get college degrees, but the average car on the street is newer and classier in Japan, and the average college graduate in England or Germany has been more rigorously educated. This kind of "democratic abundance" is part of America's industrial problem—the Japanese and Germans and Koreans, with lower overall production but higher quality piece by piece, have been overtaking us. But it also is part of this society's wonderful openness. America has always offered so much to so many because the cultural threshold has been low. Anyone could join in.

"Among democratic peoples new families continually rise from nothing while others fall, and nobody's position is quite stable," Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America*. "The woof of time is broken and the track of past generations lost. Those who have gone before are easily forgotten, and no one gives a thought to those who will follow. . . .There is nothing of tradition, family feeling, or example to restrain them."

Not everyone has to like California, or want to move there. My mother never would have if she'd married someone else. But the open, changing spirit of its society was similar to what Tocqueville described. It is still what makes America go. □

THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY

Journalism Award

for July 1988 is presented to

Douglas Lavin

The North Jersey Herald & News

This was to be the year that the New Jersey Highway Authority paid its last debts on the New Jersey Turnpike and removed tolls from the 173-mile road. Instead, the authority is operating at a $435 million loss and there's no hope of scrapping the 30 toll ramps that slow traffic. Lavin's five-part series, an impressive undertaking for a small paper, lays the blame on a highway authority that has been less than frugal: its director makes $115,000 a year, compared to $85,000 for the governor; its executives enjoy the use of 96 sedans, compared to 110 afforded the state police. True, the authority has made some major expenditures for road improvement—such as using $6.5 million of the motorists' money for its pink, marble-floored reception center.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation.

The award for stories published or aired in August will be announced in the November issue. Nominations for stories published or aired in September will close October 15. The winner will be announced in the December issue. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

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Why Did the Navy Shoot Down 290 Civilians?

A naval officer who served in the Persian Gulf explains what really *went wrong—and why it may happen again.*

by Scott Shuger

The first time anyone in the operating area of the *Vincennes* took an interest in scheduled airline traffic was one minute after the detection of Iran Air flight 655 on radar and six minutes before it was shot down. That vital information wasn't posted in grease-pencil on any of the Combat Information Center's many status boards nor logged just a button-push away in its computers. Instead, a crew member had to resort to riffling desperately through the hundreds of pages of fine-print in the *Official Airline Guide*. Although flight 655 was in fact listed in the guide as a regularly scheduled flight, with such a lack of research it's not surprising that nobody could find it. Even the ticket agents at airline counters keep flight schedules stored in computers. It's incredible that the Navy, with much more at stake than the timeliness of the Eastern Shuttle, should be so ill-prepared.

With the loss of 290 civilians, the *Vincennes* tragedy offers an illustration of how the Navy's readiness problems stem from human, rather than mechanical, deficiencies. After all, the failure to take account of airline traffic didn't arise from a malfunctioning radar, radio, or computer. There's been a lot written—much of it gushing—about the Navy that suggests otherwise. (A line from the cover story, "Tough New Navy," in the August 4, 1986, issue of *U.S. News & World Report* is typical: "Bristling with high-tech gear and missiles, the fleet is easily the most muscular America has ever put to sea.") But no matter how many wonder weapons come on the scene, the chain of command will always go through *people*. And a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Without proper planning and training, a multimillion dollar, antiair warfare system, like the Aegis radar, is no more reliable than a nervous index finger groping through an unread book.

The Defense Department flirted with this truth in its report on the shootdown. That 53-page document stated that "stress, task fixation, and unconscious distortion of data may have played a major role [in the event]." But ultimately, the Pentagon missed the point. "Singly, the errors or mistakes were not crucial to the fateful decision," stated Admiral William J. Crowe Jr., chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. "Even cumulatively, they do not appear to change the picture in a decisive way."

This sort of PR-speak keeps the military from learning from its mistakes. Contrary to what Admiral Crowe said, the *Vincennes* episode suggests

Scott Shuger is writing a book on the Navy.

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photo: U.S. Navy

Crewmember aboard the *Vincennes* during the downing of Iran Air #655.

that the Navy still hasn't adequately developed and channeled the crucial human qualities of knowledge, judgment, and decision-making skills.

Fly 'til you drop

During the past 20 years—from say, the Israeli assault on the *Liberty* in 1967 right through to last year's attack on the *Stark*, and now the *Vincennes* tragedy—the Navy's technical superiority has often been stymied by poor *thinking*. During my own experience in the Navy from 1978 to 1983, I repeatedly found defects in the Navy's planning and preparation, defects that were individually exasperating and, collectively, indicate that the mental confusion on the *Vincennes* was especially severe but not uncommon. These are the sorts of "software" problems that get overlooked because they have to do with values, role models, and psychology—topics neither contemporary military men nor strategic thinkers have much time for.

Promotion boards seem to overlook them, preferring instead to emphasize one easy-to-use criterion—raw time on the job. In the aviation world in which I served, this simplistic approach to advancement is mightily reinforced, what with all the flight jacket patches and wall plaques honoring pilots for getting a "thousand hours" (of flight time) and making "centurion" (achieving 100 carrier landings). Spend enough time in enough ready rooms and you could forget that there's anything to being a naval aviator besides "cats" (carrier launches) and "traps" (carrier landings). You could forget that the point of the job is to do some very tricky stuff in-between.

A clear example of this came when I was stationed on a carrier and my airwing was preparing a long-range airstrike against faraway practice targets. Most of the wing's aircrews were crammed into the ship's intelligence center to attend the final briefing before manning up their planes. At the head of the room was the airwing commander—"CAG" in naval parlance—who clearly considered himself to be The Right Stuff personified. As usual, his overriding concern seemed to be maintaining his lead as the man in navy history with the most carrier landings. After rushing through what was supposed to be a briefing on the ultimate carrier mission in less time than it takes just to give a weather brief, CAG was finished. He was almost out the door when the question came: "What about hung ordnance, CAG?" The question concerned what to do about bombs that

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wouldn't come off airplanes like they're supposed to. Navy airstrike plans are supposed to include measures for dealing with such dangling destruction, because it's obviously hazardous to bring such goodies back to the carrier for a landing. But sometimes the fly-boys just. . .er. . .sort of forget to mess with details like that. Before this very sensible question was raised, no one else apparently had noticed that the topic had been completely overlooked. But CAG confronted the questioner without the slightest pause for thought. "Hung ordnance? There will be no hung ordnance on this mission," he barked, his cigar tightly clenched between his teeth. "If you have a hung bomb, climb to altitude, and fly 'til you run out of gas."

The unannounced kind

The atmosphere on the *Vincennes* and even the Defense Department's own report on the episode evince a disdain for planning. Perhaps this is why the following mental lapses were overlooked by the Pentagon:

The commercial air traffic problem was taken lightly. The Middle East and Near East may be desert, but the area is packed with commercial airliners darting between Dubai, Riyadh, and other Arab cities. Besides a full complement of intra-regional flights, there are numerous daily flights connecting Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia to Europe and Asia. There are 18 commercial air routes covering at least 50 percent of the navigable waters of the Persian Gulf alone. And this is nothing new. During my carrier service in the Northern Arabian Sea in the early 1980s, my crew mates and I spent much of our time tracking and intercepting commercial airliners. There's no reason why the computers on navy ships going into the Gulf aren't stocked with all available commercial flight information—and in readily accessible form. After arriving on station, crews of the *Vincennes* and other ships with advanced radar suites should have compared their air-track logs with available scheduling information to determine if there were big gaps between scheduled and actual flight activity.

If such gaps did emerge they should have been brought to the attention of the Gulf commander and higher authorities so that intelligence sources could analyze them and diplomatic channels could notify Iranian civil air authorities. But no such research was done, and this could have been crucial, since the Iran Air flight was 25 minutes late. The indifference to the commercial air problem cannot be blamed solely on the *Vincennes*'s Captain Rogers. According to the Defense Department report, upon the *Vincennes*'s arrival in the gulf in May, when Rogers was briefed by the area commander, Admiral Anthony Less, there was no mention of specific air routes or commercial airline schedules. Nor were these schedules plotted on Admiral Less's flagship. The first time that Less provided commercial airline flight information—including an accurate and concise description of flight 655—to his ships was June 28, five days before the shootdown. (The Defense Department offers no explanation of why this important information was not used.) That the Navy was so dismally prepared for assessing scheduled aircraft does not speak well for its ability to handle the unannounced kind.

As the problem unfolded, the Navy did not make optimal use of communications. The *Vincennes* did place nine radio calls to Iran Air flight 655 on international distress frequencies, but there were other options that might have made the difference. The report notes that due to their heavy workloads, commercial cockpit crews generally don't monitor distress frequencies during take-off and ascent to cruise altitude. Therefore, after failing to reach the aircraft, it would have been advisable for the Navy to contact the Bandar Abbas airfield or the Tehran control center which were likely to be communicating with the pilot. But no such calls were attempted by the *Vincennes*, or by any of the other ships directly involved, or by the area commander. No one planned for this contingency. It might have taken a few minutes to try, but it would have been worth it. The Defense Department blames this lapse on "the limited number of VHF radios on U.S. surface units," which "degrades their ability to simultaneously monitor the [distress] frequency and communicate with civilian air traffic control agencies." Even waiving the question of why our trillion-dollar defense buildup has left us with a limited number of VHF radios, if the distress frequencies were unavailing, it would still have made sense to momentarily switch at least one radio on at least one ship to the Bandar Abbas airfield or Tehran control center. And why be restricted to *radio* communications? During the entire episode, the force commander's flagship was tied to the pier in Bahrain. Why couldn't somebody there have made a phone call or sent a telex?

The air cover we need

It is foolish to position surface ships in such a sensitive area without air cover. What Captain Rogers needed more than anything else was someone to *see* what he was up against. Given time and distance constraints, that relief could have come only via a

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pilot's visual identification (navy F-14s carry television sighting equipment that make visual ID's possible at considerable ranges) But at the time, there were no aircraft positioned to answer such a call There were no land-based fighters within range, and, at the time, the closest U S carrier, the *Forrestal*, was not operating in support of the *Vincennes* Nor were there any airborne Saudi or air force AWACS or navy E-2 planes available to help clarify the *Vincennes*'s radar data In the case of the AWACS this is especially alarming, considering that one of the main arguments for selling the planes to Saudi Arabia in the first place was that they would be there to help U S interests Because radar data tends to be equivocal—in a wide variety of circumstances, a blip is a blip is a blip—the great range and track capacity of the Aegis radar system on cruisers like the *Vincennes* exacerbates rather than diminishes uncertainty Therefore Aegis ships require more, not less, air support than less-sophisticated vessels

This wouldn't be the first time that the Navy has made less than optimal use of its planes The *Stark*, too, was without air support Additionally, in the U S military there's an unacceptable amount of bureaucracy involved in putting planes where they should be In 1982, while I was serving on the carrier *Ranger*, our airwing was augmented by a detachment from the Guam-based reconnaissance squadron, VQ-1 The presence of such VQ "dets" has long caused difficulties on deployments For one thing, the squadron flew the EA-3 Douglas Skywarrior, the largest and oldest plane regularly operating off carriers The "Electric Whale" 's immensity drives the flight deck people nuts, and its age—it's from the early 1950s—scares everybody shitless The mission of the VQ aircraft is to carry out elec-

by Gregg Easterbrook

. . . And Why Our Bombs Missed Qaddafi

The literary allusion that provides the title of this book* is slightly off, as the subjects discussed—recent U S antiterrorism efforts such as the Iran rescue attempt, the Libya raid, the Beirut security fiascos, and the machinations of North and company—rarely exhibit the character of "best laid' plans The content of the book is, however, right on the money *Best Laid Plans* is an artfully detailed and highly readable account that draws together the essentials of what has previously been revealed about American counterterrorism, while adding many compelling new details uncovered by the authors

Martin, a Pentagon reporter for CBS News and one of the network's rising stars, and Walcott, a national security correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, wisely limit their pages devoted to Oliver North Mainly they conclude that although North went haywire, "the fact that he was more likely to stand trial than Imad Mugniyah [mastermind of several Beirut kidnappings] is grotesque " I agree

Beyond North, Martin and Walcott introduce a slew of other characters central to U S counterterrorism efforts—too many to mention here, but several having fascinating stories Though their presentation is in general impartial, the authors evince a mild degree of clientism by subtly siding with the Pentagon in the numerous disputes about whether the military or the White House was most to blame for counterterrorism foul-ups perhaps a source-cultivation phenomenon, as the political *dramatis personae* of Reagan administration security planning are all either gone or will be soon, while the Pentagon is a much more permanent institution

Regarding the Libya and Bekka Valley air raids, in which concentrated U S high-tech might produced at best, nebulous results against Third World targets, *Best Laid Plans* presents a fairly convincing case that political meddling was the biggest problem On the Libya attack, Martin and Walcott report that the Air Force originally called for just six bombers flown by top pilots using tactics that would maximize their chance of survival and the chances of their precision-guided munitions (PGM) striking the targets In addition, the Air Force had no desire to hit Muammar Qaddafi's encampment, because it was too close to civilian areas Then, about 48 hours beforehand, Washington decided that it wanted 18 bombers, nine of them targeted specifically on Qaddafi Four months of planning went out the window, flight crews without combat experience had to be scared up, and the phasing of the approach to Qaddafi's compound had to be mucked up so that most of the aircraft would be trying to locate their target through the smoke and dust kicked skyward by the lead bomber's ordnance (Modern strike tactics that involve planes skimming near the ground while attempting to train sensors on their aim point make self-created smokescreens a bigger problem than they were to World War II-style bombs-away drops from higher altitudes) In light of these considerations, that one

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**Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism* David C Martin, John Walcott *Harper & Row* $22 50.

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tronic surveillance for national authorities (The squadron motto is "In God we trust, all else we monitor") This means that while these planes operate off of and work with carriers, they report to national, non-military entities like the National Security Agency As a result, like the other naval aircraft with primarily command, control, communications, and intelligence applications, the EA-3 is usually resented by the "tactical" aviators—the airwing commanders, the carrier commanding officers, and the battle group admirals—who have day-to-day control over them, as something that neither drops bombs nor fires missiles and just gets in the way The upshot is that, although VQ work is vitally important, it is often woefully underappreciated and underused by fleet commanders

While the *Ranger* was working in the Indian Ocean, VQ-1 was supposed to be on board to electronically fingerprint and monitor the burgeoning Soviet naval presence there Yet it was repeatedly turned down when it requested permission to fly missions over Soviet anchorages in the Arabian Sea such as Suquatra, a chain of islands that is often the resting place for as many as ten Soviet units at one time Although these proposed missions would have produced valuable intelligence about Soviet fleet radars, communications tactics, call-signs, et al — precisely the kind of military fine-print that the fleet needs in order to avoid making mistakes like the *Stark* or the *Vincennes* affairs—the indifference of the aviators running the *Ranger*'s fleet command kept them from ever taking place The main consequence of this was that our VQ "work" primarily consisted of launching the EA-3 for meaningless hops away from the rest of the airwing The real purpose of these flights was simply to get the mammoth plane off the deck, which facilitated the positioning of the other planes for the next launch So, out on

of the bombers trying for Qaddafi was destroyed, with loss of crew, that only two of the nine assigned to launch their allegedly foolproof PGMs against the Libyan leader even struck the general vicinity of their target, and that neither of those two scored a hit within the advertised circular-probability zone of the stuff they were using, and of course, that Qaddafi still lives, becomes less unflattering to the Air Force

Likewise, prior to the Bekka Valley raid, in which two navy aircraft were shot down and hostage Robert Goodman was taken while at best marginal damage was done to the target, there was another nutty change of plans The navy officer on the scene conceived the raid and scheduled it for noon, so that antiaircraft gunners looking up toward U S planes would be dazzled by the sun At 5:33 a m of the appointed day, as the pilots still lay in bed, a garbled order came in from an army general in Europe—one of many links in the extremely extended chain of command between Washington and the task force off Lebanon—pronouncing that the planes must be over their objective no later than 7 30 a m Apparently the Joint Chiefs of Staff had issued an ambiguous directive, in response to ambiguous signals from the White House, that it would be nice if the raid occurred within 24 hours of the official provocation, a Syrian missile unsuccessfully heaved at a U S plane at 7 30 a m the previous morning

By the time this advisory was filtered through the deskbound flag officers who had to justify their existence by signing off on it, the sentiment had been transformed into an order This meant not only that when the U S strike force arrived, flying toward the east shortly after dawn the sun was in *their* eyes, but that, astonishingly, as the groggy pilots were shaken awake and sent posthaste to their flight decks, they discovered that their planes had not been loaded with bombs Deck crews had been planning a noon raid In order to make the deadline, all but one of the aircraft had to take off without a full load of ordnance, as there wasn't time to rack up properly And what they got were standard "dumb" bombs, not the PGMs that were to be employed, because bringing the PGMs up from below would have consumed too much time and there happened to be some dumb bombs lying about the carrier decks

Such facts, vividly detailed by *Best Laid Plans*, do give pause But Martin and Walcott are less persuasive when they imply, though never state, that neither the failure of the Iran raid nor the destruction of the marine barracks ought be blamed on the Pentagon In general, the authors play up factors that show how challenging the Iran raid was (true enough) but play down or don't mention many Pentagon blunders and petty turf fights that almost surely doomed the plan from the start And when they declare that the car bomb assault on the marine barracks was "beyond the ability of Western minds even to grasp, much less defeat, readers may blanch The Marines may have been thrown into a no-win situation, but no meddling politician insisted their sentries not load their guns, an innovation of the Marines in Beirut that was close to other-worldly Nor did any pointy-headed bureaucrat tell the Marines to behave as though the very similar car-bombing of the U S embassy in Beirut, just a few months before and a few miles away, had never happened

These things matter if you believe, as I do, that

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the *Ranger* at that time—with both the Soviet fighting in Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war going at full bore—certain crucial intelligence missions were simply not being done

Iron bombs and Mavericks

In reacting to what it took to be an Iranian F-14, the Vincennes *crew displayed inadequate knowledge of a U S -made threat aircraft* Captain Rogers and the crew of the *Vincennes* thought they were aiming at an American-made plane, yet from what we know about what happened on board, the crew displayed remarkably little understanding of how the F-14 works

Some important facts The F-14 is a fighter/interceptor designed to shoot down fighters and cruise missiles Each of its principal weapons—the long-range radar-guided Phoenix missile, the mid-range radar-guided Sparrow missile, and the short-range infrared-guided Sidewinder missile—has only anti*air* capabilities In other words, it is not a bomber and the odds of one of its Sparrow missiles successfully looking down into the electronic clutter produced by any body of water and locking onto a surface target are as low as the odds of a torpedo hitting a low-flying plane In addition, nobody on board the *Vincennes* seems to have noticed that or wondered why the ship's radar-detecting equipment didn't spot any sweeps of the unique F-14 radar coming from the blip

The F-14's only standard antisurface weapon is its Vulcan cannon, whose effective range is, at best, several thousand yards And if—as has never been observed—an Iranian F-14 had been equipped with iron bombs, the Defense Department admits that the *Vincennes* was forewarned well before the 655 incident that any F-14 so outfitted would have to close

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in many respects the condition of the U.S military remains a major national worry. from Pentagon devotion of too high a proportion of precious funds to max-tech gizmos that rarely work as promised, to continued reliance on stultified hierarchies and the unrealism they generate Martin and Walcott tend to conclude that policy flaws and the political delusions that follow are what matters about America's experience with counterterrorism, and if you had to choose these would indeed be the leading candidates. But our response to terrorism and our experience in "low intensity" conflicts like Grenada have been the primary instruments for testing the post-Vietnam U S military, the most expensive single government institution in world history, and with a few heartening exceptions, such as the flawless and bloodless intercept of the Achille Lauro hijackers, the record has not been much to brag about

Granted, military establishments are designed to acquire or defend large blocks of land or sea Discrete, not-really-war, "surgical" strikes against targets entwined with civilian life are an entirely different matter from defending our country and our allies against threats of extinction (A curse be on the Kennedy administration planner who, during the Cuban missile crisis, invented the improbable notion of the surgical strike, tugging as it has at Washington wish-fulfillment mechanisms ever since) But it is no longer true, as the Pentagon used to assert when rationalizing ill preparation for "special operations," that U.S. society devotes scant resources to counterterrorism.

During the Reagan years, billions have been funneled to exactly that arena; the check has practically been blank A new Pentagon structure, the Joint Special Operations Command, has been established and granted nearly every item on its wish list, including exemption from "political interference" (i.e , scrutiny) by Congress. The result, as *Best Laid Plans* indicates if read closely, appears to be another self-interested, top-heavy military bureaucracy In conjunction there have been breakdowns like the Yellow Fruit silliness detailed by Stephen Emerson in his recent book *Secret Warriors* and corruption of some officers who were billed as "crack." Since policy fads, imagemaker focuses, and presidential advisers come and go, I fear the Pentagon's mixed record on special operations may in the long run be a more important story than the North, Hezbollah, and hostage issues. Thus I wish Martin and Walcott had turned their considerable talents on that issue more fully.

Probably many reviewers will conclude that *Best Laid Plans* is well written and well reported but that it stumbles on its brief, slapped-on, and vaguely worded section that begins, "How *should* the U.S. react to terrorism?" Such an assessment is accurate but not necessarily to the authors' detriment. The dilemma of stopping terrorism while remaining a democracy that plays by the rules has left reeling everyone who has pondered its specifics Have you ever read *any* prescription for swift and decisive response, no more coddling, time for a crackdown, etc , that can't be summarized as Easier Said Than Done? Martin and Walcott regularly emphasize this theme, never slipping over into the hype-journalism temptation of implicitly ridiculing others for failing to do what the journalist himself cannot say how to do That's to their credit, as is just about everything in this fine, timely book □

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to within two miles of its target to drop them. So even on the assumption that the *Vincennes* was dealing with an F-14, it's not clear why the decision was made to shoot at something *ten miles away and two miles high*.

Mind games

Against this, the Pentagon's report raises the possibility that the Iranian F-14s had been modified to carry sophisticated antiship weapons, mentioning that last February, Iranian *F-4s* fired antisurface Maverick missiles at a Liberian tanker near where the *Vincennes* was on the fateful day. But the report gives no examples of Iranian F-14s operating with Mavericks. And what is much more important, there is absolutely no evidence that anyone on the *Vincennes* gave any thought to what kinds of weapons the incoming blip represented. During the incident, there was never any mention of Mavericks or any other antiship system. The biggest clue to how little consideration was given to this question is that when the *Vincennes* fired its missiles, it was already three miles *inside* the blip's Maverick range.

Throughout the Iran Air calamity, only the commanding officer of the frigate *Sides* was thinking clearly enough about F-14s. Based on the F-14's lack of antisurface weaponry, the total absence of correlating F-14 radar reception, and the lack of precedent, he concluded that the approaching unknown aircraft was a "non-threat." The nub of the tragedy is that he was the only person involved who was considering all types of information in making an assessment.

The Navy doesn't adequately prepare its shipboard personnel for the psychological environment of combat. The 655 report describes how the widespread yelling and shouting on the *Vincennes* and its hard-turning gun battle probably clouded crew members' judgments. It's disarming to note that the psychological consequences of naval combat took experienced navy investigators somewhat by surprise. But their recommendation of studying crew stress levels is a good start. And here's a stronger suggestion I hope the Navy's higher-ups will take to heart: for goodness' sake, don't just *study* combat stress—*replicate* it in training. Fear and urgency have always been staples in basic training and in elite units, but regrettably they rarely have been significant elements in the weapons and tactical training most sailors receive (see "Hurts So Good," Scott Shuger, May 1988).

The 655 investigation report states that the "Aegis combat system's performance was excellent." In light of the results, that is like saying, "The operation was a success, but the patient died." Who cares if a bunch of antennas, tape heads, and TV screens are working? If 655 proved anything, it proved that although technical efficiency may be necessary for combat success, it will never be sufficient. The crucial additional components required will always be *human* qualities—knowledge, foresight, inventiveness, and resolve. Indeed, because "excellent" hardware like the Aegis radar inflicts unprecedented amounts of equivocal information on its users, people in the Navy need these qualities to an unprecedented degree.

Despite the focus on hardware shared by hawks and doves, the Navy's chances for success in combat really depend above all else on the mental skills of its crews and especially its commanders. Somehow missing from current defense debates is the obvious fact that a 600-ship Navy with only 200 high-quality skippers is just a 200-ship Navy with three times the problems.

Almost everything about the 655 shootdown is an indication of the catastrophic extent to which the Navy downplays thinking—as was the Pentagon's decision to break with naval tradition by not holding Captain Rogers accountable. In summing things up, Admiral Crowe said of Rogers, "Given what was in his mind at the time, there was no other prudent or responsible course." But what's clear now is that he should have had more in his mind. □

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TIDBITS AND OUTRAGES

BUT THE PETITIONER WILL APPEAL THE RULING BANNING FROGS' HEADS IN THE WORKPLACE

In Ontario, an arbitration board has ruled that an employee who practices witchcraft must be given religious holidays off.

THE GIFT SHOP IS REFRIGERATED

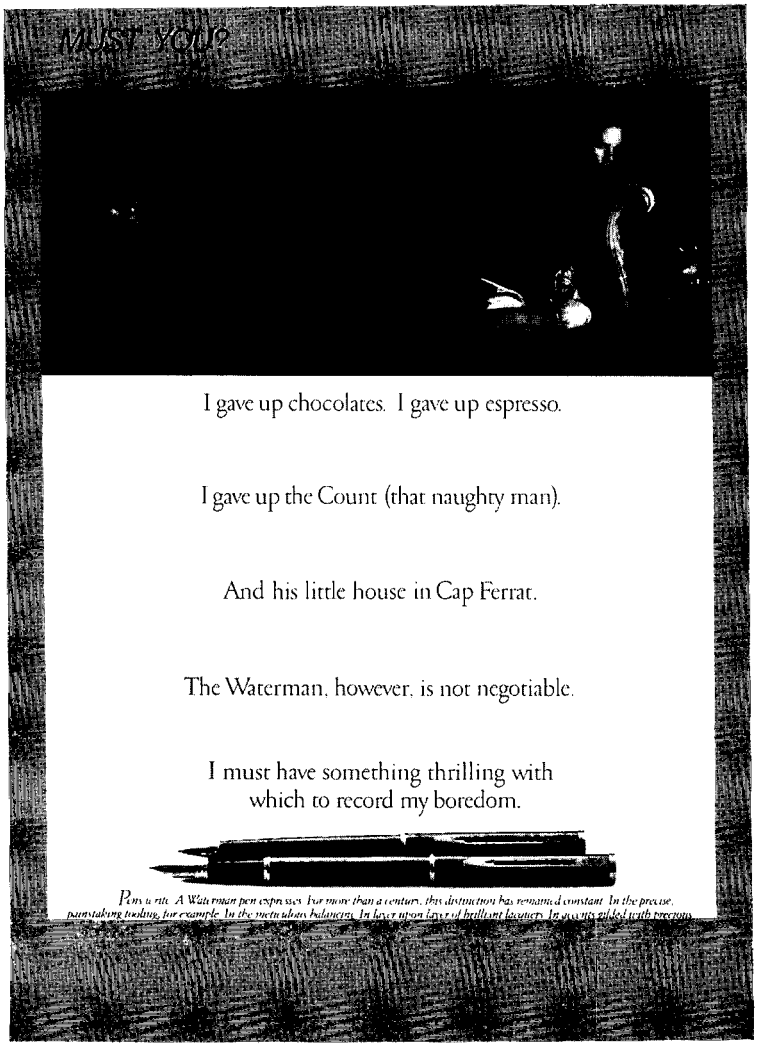
The State of New York spent $175,000 to establish the Museum of Cheese.

TRUTH IN ADVERTISING

Ben Collier, an Alabama businessman, sponsored a $250 dove shoot to raise funds for the Defense Research Institute.

SUNRISE SERVICE

In Phoenix, Jessica Hahn has signed on to be a morning disc jockey.



NOT INCLUDING PENSION BENEFITS

The baby appearing in the play *Wine in My Blood* is paid $100 a minute.

ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAM

The American Cyanamid Corporation is offering a $1,000 prize for the largest cockroach.

HOME OF THE VEGETARIAN CD

To change its image, the Sanyo Mutual Bank of Tokyo has renamed itself the "Tomato Bank"

"NICE SALON, MONSIEUR...SHAME IF SOMETHING SHOULD HAPPEN TO IT."

A Swiss clinic has been found guilty of falsely advertising that it had treated Frank Sinatra with a "youth serum" of sheep cells.

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April 1988

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Assistant Secretary of What?

The secret jobs that can really make a difference.

by Matthew Cooper, Jason DeParle, and Charles Peters

It's November 9. You're exhausted. You've just spent two months pledging allegiance and two years traveling from Des Moines to Pennsylvania Avenue. Now comes appointment time. But far from being a pleasure, it's taking all your energy. Just thinking about who should be Secretary of Agriculture gives you a headache. (The farm state governors are calling you; the National Cattlemen's Association has some ideas; your staff is bickering again.) The last thing you want to think about is your appointment to the Merit Systems Protection Board or the Consumer Products Safety Commission. You can leave this stuff to your cabinet secretaries or your pollsters or the people in the party. You just concentrate on the big jobs, like Treasury and Defense.

But sometimes the president should focus on the trees as well as the forest. We're not saying that he should pore over every job in Carter fashion. But there are little-known posts in the government that demand the president's interest—jobs with long, boring titles that, if performed well, can become truly important. Call them Power Pockets. Do you remember Julius B. Richmond? He was Jimmy Carter's Surgeon General. Today C. Everett Koop has made that office important by banging the drums—sending everyone in the country a pamphlet on AIDS, going *mano a mano* with the New Right on sex education, wrestling with the tobacco lobby. You can't forget his Amish-style beard, and you can't deny he's made a difference. Same with William Bennett. The education secretary isn't exactly the most pivotal member of the cabinet; after all, town councils and state legislatures run our schools. But Bennett, of course, came in and gave a boost to the reform movement—fueling important debates on awarding teachers merit pay, teaching great books, and controlling the costs of higher education. (He steered the AIDS debate in a lousy direction, but that's another story.) He filled the Power Pocket.

If an appointee is going to bring provocative ideas to his office—ideas guaranteed to earn him the wrath of interest groups, Congress, and the civil service—then he needs the president's support. Ideally, the president will stand up for him, loudly at press conferences and quietly on the phone to lawmakers. Barring that, the good appointee needs a healthy dose of presidential indulgence, the freedom to speak from the heart even if the president won't embrace his ideas. Reagan doesn't buy the whole Koop agenda, but he hasn't shut him up either.

We don't stay awake nights thinking Michael Dukakis will take our counsel. (And we're even more doubtful that George Bush has the vision to pick those we're proposing.) These are not the staid names from permanent Washington—fixtures like Robert Strauss, Zbigniew Brzezinski, James Schlesinger, Anne Wexler (see "The Powers that Shouldn't Be: Five Washington Insiders the Next Democratic President Shouldn't Hire," Paul Glastris, October 1987). But haven't we had enough? For instance, when it comes to campaign spending, we do not

Matthew Cooper, Jason DeParle, and Charles Peters are the editors of The Washington Monthly.

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need someone who's going to be squeamish about wringing the big PACs and special interests out of Congress.

While we're wary of the inside respectables, we're just as suspicious of the face that's too fresh. Both Carter and Reagan fed us the line that to make Washington work we darn well needed someone from outside the Beltway to kick some horse sense into those bureaucrats. From Hamilton Jordan to Ed Meese we've seen what happens when novices are handed the tiller. So while the people we've picked aren't the biggest names, they know Washington. They know the complex latticework of agencies, interest groups, the executive branch, and the courts.

This supple understanding of government has been the signal quality in the best of our leaders. FDR owes much of his greatness to his experience as, of all things, a bureaucrat. During World War I, as an assistant secretary of the Navy (a job comparable in rank to the ones described here), he learned how *not* to trust the chain of command. In the White House he played rivals Harold Ickes and Harry Hopkins against one another, asking each what he thought of the other's latest proposal. At times his understanding of the system could be eerily sharp. Leon Keyserling, then an aide to Senator Robert Wagner, recalled an occasion when the president buttonholed him: "I just want to ask you one question about the housing bill. Have you got anything in there to keep the sand and gravel men out of it?" Keyserling, caught off guard, said he didn't understand. "You know," the president said, "to keep out the people who sell the government materials for mixing sand with cement." Having been in charge of the Navy's procurement, FDR was wise to the shenanigans of contractors.

The six jobs we've chosen illustrate a larger point. Throughout the government there are lesser-known posts with rich potential—positions that, if administered with that rare combination of vision and street-smarts, can make all the difference.

—M.C. for the editors

►Chairman, Federal Communications Commission: In 1970, an unknown state legislator named Lawton Chiles strapped on a pair of hiking boots and walked his way from obscurity to a seat in the U.S. Senate. He spent only $375,000 and refused campaign contributions of more than $10. Ninety-two days of trekking across Florida brought him the voter appeal he needed. The Floridian who wins this year's senatorial contest will probably spend about $6 million. As head of the Senate Budget Committee, Chiles was in a position to raise the formidable sums needed. But the prospect of constant political panhandling proved too much and he gave up his seat. Chiles is leaving at a time when his average senate colleague is raising $10,000 a week, every week, for all six years of his or her term.

The escalating role of money in politics has a host of antidemocratic effects. Politicians spend ever-increasing amounts of time raising money, rather than thinking or legislating. Political action committees increase their grip on the system, promoting special interest politics. PAC politics is bad for both parties, but as Robert Kuttner has written, it's particularly bad for the Democrats, since it increases their reliance on Big Money and weakens what should be their economic populism.

While few people realize it, the place to strike a blow for democratic restoration is the FCC. That's because of the role that television advertising plays in inflating campaign costs. When Alan Cranston spent $13 million on his 1986 senate race, TV and fundraising consumed 83 percent of his budget.

The candidates ought to spend $0 for their TV ads. And with the right kind of FCC leadership, they could. Television stations don't "own" the airwaves; they borrow them—for free—from the public. And they reap huge profits while doing so. A requirement for stations to provide qualified candidates with air time isn't asking much in return. Such ideas may sound radical, but virtually every European democracy provides candidates with free air time.

A typical objection to this plan is that in major markets like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, there are too many candidates within a station's broadcast range to accommodate them all. There's one easy answer to the quandary: start with the

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presidential candidates. That's a requirement that every station could meet, and it would establish an important principle of public service. As for the other candidates in crowded metropolitan areas, stations could offer them the choice between air time and enough postage to mail a letter to every voter in the district. Or they could give the air time to the parties and let them parcel it out among their candidates as they see fit.

The FCC should also eliminate the packaging of political commercials and require candidates simply to face a camera instead, offering voters their words and ideas. As Curtis Gans has written, slick and deceptive television ads have the power to "wreck a lifetime of loyal, effective public service and with it the stability upon which American democracy depends."

We think Mark Green is an ideal choice to head the FCC. Green, head of the New York-based Democracy Project, understands the insidious effects of money and television on politics from many angles: as a journalist, an activist, and a former candidate. As an alumnus of Ralph Nader's corporate accountability group, where he specialized in antitrust matters, Green has spent a lot of time thinking about corporate responsibility. As author of *Who Runs Congress?*, he is savvy about Capitol Hill. And as the winner of the 1986 Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate in New York, Green has practical experience in campaigning and a history of sticking to his principles: he accepted no PAC money, spent only $40,000 on television ads—and beat a candidate who outspent him by nearly eight times.

—*J.D.*

►**State Department, Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs**: It's becoming more and more obvious that pollution—whether it's acid rain in Lansing or record-breaking temperatures in Sioux Falls—is the result of complex, international problems that can't be solved in Washington by a few good bills and a couple of tighter regulations. The problems need to be confronted in Brazilia, Prague, and capitals around the world.

When it comes to international environmental issues—like the emission of ozone-depleting chemicals and ocean dumping—no single agency is taking the lead. "Nobody is giving marching orders. There is no drill instructor to melt [the agencies] into one common goal," says Rep. Dennis Eckart, an Ohio Democrat who was an observer to the international agreement on the ozone.

Take the problem of deforestation, the clearing of trees in the Third World to make room for growing populations and to pay foreign debt. It is a regular practice in Brazil where the forests being cleared can be as large as Texas. The major consequence produced by burning that many trees and sending that much soot into the atmosphere: global warming. About 200 billion tons of carbon is bound up in the plants of the Amazon rain forests—carbon that, if the trees are burned, becomes carbon dioxide and contributes to the greenhouse effect.

In the United States, there's no shortage of civil servants who deal with the deforestation abroad. The Agency for International Development spends $120 million to promote environmentally sound projects. To monitor those projects, AID taps scientific expertise in the Soil Conservation Service, and other parts of the Agriculture Department, as well as the Fish and Wildlife Service. If you're talking atmosphere, you're also talking NASA's Earth Sciences Systems Committee and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration at Commerce. You want international agreements? It's up to the State Department and the United Nations to negotiate treaties on the greenhouse effect. And don't forget the Environmental Protection Agency has an office of international activities, too.

The person in charge ought to be the Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International En-

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vironmental and Scientific Affairs. His bureau, the OES, negotiates international treaties and as such can go to foreign capitals and work out bilateral and international agreements.

Under the Reagan administration, the office has earned far less scorn than Donald Hodel's Interior Department. But the next administration needs to do much, much more. For instance:

Cooling the skies. Get an international treaty to stem the emissions of carbon dioxide and other chemicals that become trapped in the atmosphere and warm the earth. Then, use the OES as a bully pulpit to convince Americans to conserve like they never have before. (The United States and the Soviet Union produce about half of the world's carbon dioxide.) Cut the international deals so that Third World countries can get their economies into this century and not contribute to international pollution.

The Assistant Secretary for OES needs the authority to cut nothing less than a global bargain whereby private banks ease and even forgive international debt in exchange for specific forest conservation plans. Bullying Citibank into such a position will be no picnic but there's little choice. Deforestation accounts for a fifth of the world's carbon dioxide emissions. And as James Gustave Speth, president of the World Resources Institute has pointed out, we have leverage. Of the top 17 most heavily indebted countries, 12 are destroying their tropical rain forests at a brisk clip.

Saving the Oceans. There was a point when ocean pollution seemed like a purely local issue—an oil spill in Santa Barbara. But this summer it's become painfully clear that this is everyone's problem. Most notoriously, there are the vials of medical waste. The U.S. remains the chief obstacle to passage of the Law of the Sea treaty which contains strict provisions on the dumping of radioactive wastes in the seabed and the dumping of toxic waste at sea. Why have we been so obstinate? U.S. energy interests have been leaning for a better deal on underwater mining.

Doing our part. The U.S. has been shameless in the export of toxic wastes. The GAO found that the amount of hazardous waste produced in the United States swelled from 9 million metric tons in 1970 to 247 million in 1984. With disposal costs getting higher in the U.S., American companies have found a willing market in the Third World. The number of shipments going abroad, according to the EPA's Office of International Activities, has jumped from 30 to 400 last year. As the *Nation* reported, those figures may well be off because of overlapping bureaucracies within EPA: "Export of certain chemicals, like polychlorinated biphenals (PCBs), is forbidden by the Toxic Substances Control Act and is regulated by the EPA's toxic substances division which does not handle exports." Again, the OES head needs the authority to cut through those bureaucratic lines and take action.

Someone who seems poised to carry the torch is Richard Benedick, a career civil servant in the State Department who negotiated the ozone treaty. His performance was universally praised. Here's to hoping he has the chance to make a clunky title a household word.

—*M.C.*

►**Director, Office of Personnel Management**: Let's say you're a go-getter of a young college grad out to make your mark on the world but unsure where to start. You polish up your Thom McAns and slide on down to the placement office. There to greet you are the emissaries of Goldman Sachs, Exxon, American Hospital Supply, and Touche Ross. But before you take the plunge into corporate life, another thought crosses your young mind: government service. No, no recruiters are scheduled this fall, a placement officer says, but there is a Federal Job Information Center downtown. This turns out to be an unmanned kiosk, decorated in pale green papers that say "Job Notice." That settles it. Private sector, you think, here I come.

Is it any surprise that not enough talented people want to work in government? Only about 3 percent of recent Harvard graduates have chosen to pursue government work of any sort. The figures from the Kennedy School of *Government* are even more disturbing. Three-quarters of its graduates take jobs outside the government. The next administration needs to wage an all-out war to lure top people, not only from the Ivy League but from a thousand different and diverse backgrounds. The talent scout ought to be director of the little-noticed Office of Personnel Management.

Remember, federal jobs were once considered exciting work. The modern federal bureaucracy dates to the Roosevelt years, when its exponential growth was animated by the twin missions of fighting the Depression and the war. By contrast, today's federal bureaucracy is suffused with a culture of caution—too often, it attracts workers concerned more with job security than with what the job accomplishes. One measure of that caution is the quit rate, which is less than 2 percent at the GS12-15 level. The rhetoric of recent presidential elections hasn't done much to help, with triumphant candidates Carter and Reagan both belittling the federal bureaucracy instead of aiming to inspire it. Several years ago, a former OPM executive from the Reagan years went

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as far as to argue that top talent has no place in government. The federal government should "be content to hire competent people, not the best," wrote Terry W. Culler on the op-ed page of *The Wall Street Journal*, while "the brightest and most talented people should work in the private sector."

With comments like that, it's little wonder that so many bureaucrats perceive their work as meaningless. That sense no doubt contributed to the doubling of complaints before the Federal Labor Relations Authority from 1978 to 1983—covering such vital matters as the positioning of cubicle partitions and the placement of office coffee pots. The *Washington Post* has recently featured letters from civil servants complaining about co-workers' gum-chewing habits and polyester apparel. Such complaints are the work of minds that think they have nothing better to do.

To counter these forces, the next OPM director will have to tackle not only recruitment but also:

Pay: To attract people with technical skills—accountants, engineers, nurses—we may need to boost federal salaries, since for these people government usually holds no inherent allure. But for those with an interest in policy, government work could carry its own rewards, *if* the sense of purpose and meaning returns. A warning to the next OPM director: one tool federal workers frequently use to make themselves seem underpaid is the inflated job title, which gives to your average GS13 responsibilities that would make the president of GM quiver. Beware civil servants bemoaning "comparable" salaries in the private sector.

Discipline: "THUMPA, THUMPA, THUMPA . . . ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST." The sounds of your tax dollars at work? Unfortunately, yes—at least in the Department of Labor, where that tune was one of many filling the corridors a few years ago after a union contract gave workers the right to play tape decks at their desks. Lack of discipline discourages not only managers but other workers. Who wants to be the one person in the office working late if everyone else is cutting out at 4:30?

Our choice for the next OPM director is Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, a Maryland state administrator who has extolled the service ethic in its many manifestations—from after-school volunteerism to government service by top professionals. She understands that when you have people fighting the mafia, searching for cancer cures, guiding passenger jets from the skies, or performing countless other government tasks, you don't want to settle for the "merely competent." Her 1986 run for Congress made the service ethic a campaign centerpiece. In seeking to turn the office into a bully pulpit for citizen obligation, Townsend, Robert Kennedy's daughter, won't be hampered by her family name. The celebrity-conscious press is likely to give her a platform for her infectious enthusiasm.

—*J.D.*

►**Health and Human Services; Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation**: The next president will inherit one of the truly mixed blessings in our society: an aging population. Obviously, the increase in life expectancy strains the public health care system. As Phillip Longman points out, today Americans spend $35.2 billion annually on nursing home care, most of that on persons over 80. Of course, this is what we are spending *before* the Baby Boom reaches retirement age. Those over 80 now constitute the fastest-growing age group. Meeting the demand for their care would require the construction of one 220-room nursing home every day for the rest of the century. Unless we come up with solutions, we face the gloomy prospect of more busted budgets (government and individual), lousy institutional care for the elderly poor, and resentment between young and old.

How can an obscure official with a cumbersome title make a difference? This office is the brains of HHS, filled with economists, actuaries, mathematicians, and others who can help map out a long-term care plan for the next century. Its budget of $11 million is bigger than that of the American Enterprise Institute.

One person who's up to the job is Barbara Torrey, an economist who has worked in the Bureau of the Census and the Office of Management and Budget. Credit her with one of the most elegant and equitable ideas for tackling the long-term health crisis: The Pay When You Go Plan. Medicare recipients almost always receive benefits far in excess of the contributions they've paid in—and some of them then leave substantial estates. Under Torrey's plan, they would be required to repay some of that largesse through a final estate contribution. It would require the rich to repay the most, and the poor, who leave little or no estate, would repay very little—preserving the principle that Medicare should most help those who most need it. The plan is not only sensible, it's delicious. Right now the children of the affluent have the best of both worlds. They let the government pick up the tab for much of their parents' care, and they get to enjoy a large estate. Torrey's plan means no more free brunch. If they let the government pay for dad's nursing home, they won't inherit that trust fund. In the spirit of family togetherness, the plan gives the sons and daughters of the affluent an

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incentive to keep parents' health care costs low, perhaps by taking their parents into their home rather than letting the taxpayers pick up the cost.

—*M.C.*

►**Director, Office of Management and Budget**: Thinking about the OMB can remind you of Stalin's question: "How many divisions does the Pope have?" This White House office has some 550 employees, but because its job is to just say no to the other three million federal employees, the director's chair at OMB is one of the most important positions Michael Dukakis or George Bush will fill.

And it could be more important if OMB was organized to evaluate how *wisely* the government spends its trillion dollar budget. Right now, OMB prepares a budget worked out by separate budget analysts (who prepare the numbers) and management analysts (who look at organizational inefficiencies, like the failure of agencies to keep monies in interst-bearing accounts). But none of these analysts undertakes a systematic *evaluation* of programs: no one judges what really works and what doesn't, what's needed and what isn't.

Instead OMB plays the percentage game. Take, for instance, OMB's National Security Division, which covers the Pentagon. In his book, *The Defense Game*, Richard A. Stubbing, a former head of the division, describes how OMB can get conned by the brass. While OMB prepares alternatives to the Pentagon budget requests, the previous year's funding level (plus inflation) is the starting point for negotiations. Discussions between OMB and the Pentagon brass focus only on the real rate of *growth*.

Another con the Pentagon uses to get its way with OMB is the "inflation rate" trick. The Pentagon uses its own estimate of inflation and—guess what?—its rate is *higher* than the consumer price index, which is used in most government programs. This rate, of course, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as defense suppliers find that they can get away with charging the Pentagon ever more. According to the General Accounting Office, from fiscal year 1982 through September 1985 the Pentagon's "inflation rate" resulted in $36.8 billion in extra spending.

And these are the big budget issues that OMB is supposed to be good at. OMB has no real mechanism for evaluating specific weapons systems, nor for keeping watch over those who are supposed to be doing evaluation within the Pentagon.

Another ill that has continued under all OMB directors, Democrat and Republican alike, is the end-of-the-year spending spree. As the end of the fiscal year, September 30, approaches, agencies that have money on hand quickly find a way to spend it, lest they come in under budget and find their appropriation cut for the next year. When reporters from *Industry Week* asked if OMB kept tabs on fourth-quarter spending sprees, they were told "no." The GAO, however, found that some agencies spewed money in the final hours of the year. In 1985, the Environmental Protection Agency spent 54 percent of its budget in the final quarter; the Commerce Department, 38 percent.

What should OMB be? While being skeptical of all government programs, it must be much more than the "Abominable No-Man," as it's occasionally referred to. During the 1960 transition, Richard Neustadt understood this. In a memo on OMB, the political scientist wrote president-elect Kennedy: "The reason why your man ought to be program-minded, not a cost accountant, is that national or presidential needs may call on him or you to say 'yes'. . . ."

To be able to say "yes" with confidence, the agency must combine the management and budget functions, forming a kind of superevaluation agency that can provide crucial, disinterested intelligence to the president about what is going on in his own government. In effect, it should be an intelligence agency in the best sense of the word, providing information on what's going on in the Department of Labor, just as the CIA is supposed to be providing intelligence on the Soviet Union. The question should not be just: "Well, should we add or subtract 3 percent from last year's budget?" Instead, OMB evaluators should ask: "Is this program needed?" "If it's needed, is it working?"

The evaluators must be the right kind of people. To be sure, the agency has always teemed with the best and the brightest of civil servants. (There's an old yarn about the agency's professionalism that goes: if an occupying army of Martians invaded Washington, OMB would work around the clock to insure an orderly transition to power.)

But smarts is no substitute for experience. What OMB needs is regular infusions of the best civil servants from across the government, young enough to be vigorous, confident enough to burn bridges with their old agencies.

Charles Schultze, Lyndon Johnson's budget director, tried to get field offices for the Bureau of the Budget, the precursor to OMB. He told Congress that the agency was unable to conduct "firsthand observations and analysis." But Congress, fearing an executive branch equivalent of the GAO, rejected the request. It was a mistake. Having people out in the field with the authority to audit at random could go a long way towards eliminating waste—and striking fear into the hearts of GS13s everywhere.

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James Fallows is our choice to be director of OMB. While modesty makes us reluctant to tout one of our own (Fallows is a former editor of *The Washington Monthly*) he, more than anyone we know, has the mix of investigative skills, government experience, and policy smarts that the next director needs. As a journalist, Fallows has immersed himself in the minutiae of defense spending; in government, he served as chief speech writer to President Carter. Fallows understood—early—that Carter had become hopelessly insulated from the problems of his administration. He offered to make himself the president's eyes-and-ears, criss-crossing the country to sound the alarm about what was wrong in the bureaucracy. Carter rejected the offer, relying instead on conventional channels to keep him informed. When it comes to OMB, let's hope the next president isn't so short-sighted.

—*M.C.*

►**Director, Selective Service**: In Washington there are many buildings and monuments that inspire awe. But this is most certainly not the feeling one has when looking at the offices of the Selective Service. They are housed in a small, commercial office building that could be in any office park anywhere. I hope, though, that the modest quarters and the modest prestige of the Selective Service will not deter the president from naming a first-rate director, someone who believes that the burden of military service should be shared by all classes and who favors a fair draft that will take rich and poor alike.

The upper classes have been avoiding service by, in effect, having society bribe the poor and the lower middle class to do the serving for them. When I was in the Army, I was paid $50 a month. Since I got free room, board, and clothing, I didn't need any more. Twenty years after I entered the service, the beginning pay had risen to only $78 a month because there was still a draft. But today, because the military has to meet its manpower needs solely by attracting volunteers, it has to offer beginning pay of around $600 a month. If a draft was instituted, the pay could be cut in half. The other half represents the bribe that persuades the poor to enlist and permits the affluent to avoid doing their part. The waste and the immorality are so blatant that one wonders how anyone can justify not having a draft that takes both rich and poor.

The affluent say that they don't want their children drafted to die in another Vietnam or to be brutalized by the kind of vicious superiors who were depicted in *From Here to Eternity*. The more thoughtful argue that compulsion is wrong in a free society. But *From Here to Eternity* was about an all-volunteer army with the same class structure as today's, and draftees would never have been sent to Vietnam if there had been influential parents to object. Indeed, it was fear of just such opposition that kept Lyndon Johnson from drafting the rich. I wish compulsion weren't necessary. I wish people would volunteer. But the rich and the upper middle class aren't volunteering. It would be nice if people volunteered to pay taxes, but they never have. We need the force of law to make sure that some burdens are shared.

To persuade the nation and the Congress that such a law is necessary, we need a Selective Service director who can inspire and appeal to the idealism of the young. I don't know who that person is, but I do know he should be capable of the kind of exciting advocacy that I saw Sargent Shriver, a vital and energetic navy veteran in his forties, bring to the early days of the Peace Corps.

The new director's most powerful argument will be the need to bring the people of this country together again. When I was growing up, the social classes mixed in the public schools. But there has been an increasing tendency of the affluent to send their children either to private or to elite suburban schools. Their children are missing something important, just as are those poor kids who only get to know other poor kids in the ghetto. That something is a sense of community and a faith in democracy.

When you've actually known people from all walks of life, you're not going to believe that any class has a monopoly on virtue or vice. You will not make the error of the liberal who assumes that the poor are all deserving any more than you will that of the conservative who thinks they are all lazy or dumb. You will find out that people with good common sense can come from the farm as well as the country club. These are all lessons that badly need to be learned by young people today and they are all lessons that can be learned in a military in which rich and poor serve.

Incidentally, I have a strong suspicion that a fair draft will produce a better military. We are more likely to get rid of those weapons that don't work when it is the children of the influential who will be complaining about them. If word of that unsafe troop carrier were presented to the secretary of the army by his son—rather than in a 362-page report from the General Accounting Office—quick action would be more likely. During World War II, when you had Bushes and Kennedys flying planes, you saw things happen. Remember how little time it took for the inferior P-40 to be replaced by the excellent P-51.

—*C.P.*

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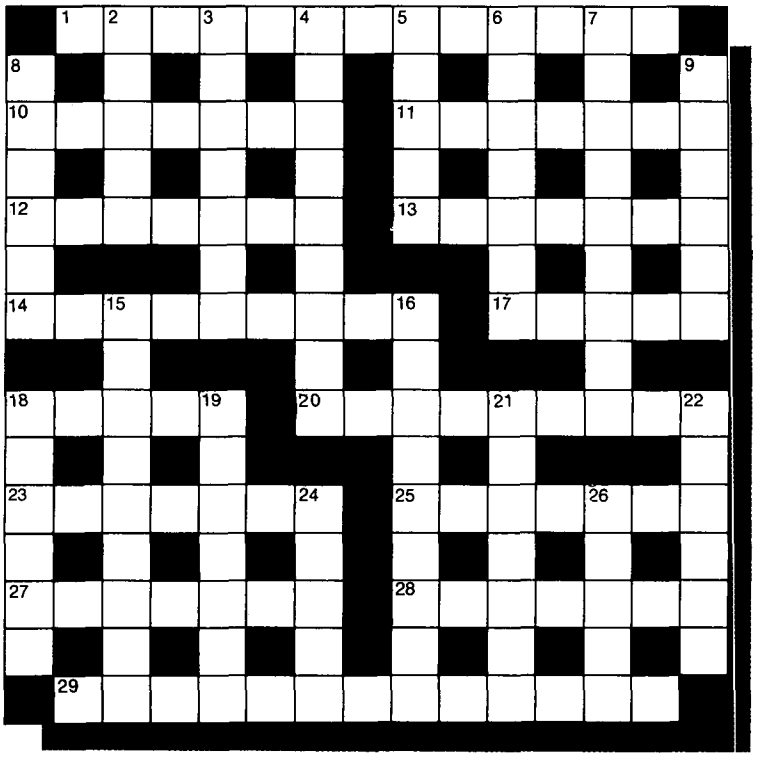
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



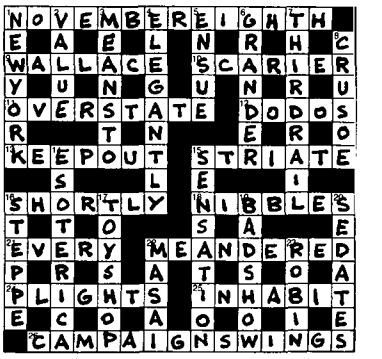
ACROSS

1. A home in the land...(see 29 Across). (13)
10. Espouser is more able around party. (7)
11. Ate dual stew to flatter. (7)
12. Pace-type dogs. (7)
13. Gathers father in returning more scattered. (7)
14. Sundance testing group was intentionally inaccurate and clean. (9)
17. High-grade former delight. (5)
18. Rope at Air Force display. (5)
20. Ugly business playing Tass nines. (9)
23. Animal chewing fig fare. (7)
25. Plowed ground around middle of field experience. (7)
27. Dance obstruction becomes verse form.(7)
28. Pound amber roughly for vegetation. (7)
29. ...is worth two for the bush (see 1 Across). (5,3,5)

DOWN

2. Twist tuba around ring approximately. (5)
3. Appealing literary family? (7)
4. Tin chairs arranged for church group. (9)
5. Chain cast a slur. (5)
6. Toss Kennedy a cue to train. (7)
7. Explain peculiar Royal Academy talents. (9)
8. Health group's sun set over Caribbean resort. (6)
9. Special purpose vehicle in the arsenal. (6)
15. Pleasure trip causes ire unreasonably. (3,6)
16. Burst and died clumsily out of order. (9)
18. Blows that are sometimes civil. (6)
19. Crop Landon planted twice and started again. (7)
21. Popular princess in Midwest. (7)
22. Novel credos made a mark. (6)
24. Get more from taxer rudely. (5)
26. Statesman displays addled brain. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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In Pennsylvania, workers forged steel and a separate culture. Now both are almost gone.

Closing Up Bars and Closing Up Shop on the Monongahela

by David Ignatius

One sad footnote to the troubles of industrial America is the decline of a proud specialty in American journalism: the labor reporter. In the old days covering unions was like covering the American dream, and it attracted some of the country's best and wisest reporters: John P. Moody at *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, A.H. Raskin at *The New York Times*, Frank Swoboda at *The Washington Post*, and the last three managing editors of *The Wall Street Journal*—Fred Taylor, Larry O'Donnell, and Norm Pearlstine—who all cut their teeth as newspapermen in Detroit.

What a job! And what an assault on the liver! Labor reporters and their sources closed saloons up and down the Monongahela River, along the shores of Lake Erie and Lake Michigan, at the resorts where unions invariably went for their conventions—Las Vegas, Atlantic City, Bal Harbour. One veteran labor reporter gave me some earnest advice when I began covering the beat in the mid-1970s: Always keep a bottle in your hotel room for when the bars close.

Our expense accounts included some bizarre items: trip to dog races in Miami with source, visit to strip joint in Las Vegas with source, champagne for bar girl and source in Chicago. Improbable as it sounds, on my first date with my future wife, in 1977, I took her to a professional wrestling match in Wheeling, West Virginia, where one of my best sources—the president of a Jones & Laughlin local in Pittsburgh—was wrestling under the name "Jumpin' Johnny DeFazio."

The danger for reporters in those days—other than alcohol poisoning—was that covering labor was like covering the home team. Unions were as American as apple pie, as American as piroshkis and kielbasa. Most reporters remained skeptical of the union leadership, which was often corrupt and sometimes tyrannical. But many journalists doted on union dissidents, like the Steelworkers' Ed Sadlowski and the Mineworkers' Arnold Miller. And even the best reporters tended to be sentimental about the workers themselves. Rare indeed were stories in the 1970s warning that the workers in the steel and auto industries who were winning huge wage increases might be pricing themselves out of jobs.

Among the best of the labor reporters in those days—and one who consistently avoided the mistakes of so many of his colleagues—was John Hoerr of *BusinessWeek*. Nobody had better sources, and nobody tried harder to cover both sides of the story—labor and management—fairly and accurately. I remember the anxious feeling when *BusinessWeek* arrived at my office in Pittsburgh each week, as I waited to see whether Hoerr had scooped us again. But even Hoerr, I suspect, did not fully appreciate the forces that were transforming the labor movement and smokestack America in the 1970s.

Now, in a remarkable piece of reporting* and writing, Hoerr has tried to tell one of the great stories of our time: the rise and fall of the American steel industry. And he has told it with the richness and compassion that could come only from someone whose roots are in the mill valleys of western Pennsylvania. Here's the way Hoerr remembers the scene at Musulin's Cafe in the mill town of McKeesport, Pennsylvania when he was a boy in the 1940s:

"At the age of ten or so, I knew nothing about

David Ignatius, a former editor of The Washington Monthly, *covered the steel industry for* The Wall Street Journal *from 1976 to 1978. He is editor of* The Washington Post*'s "Outlook" section.*

And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry. John P. Hoerr. *University of Pittsburgh Press, $29.95.*

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steelmaking, but I learned to identify men by their jobs. The jobs carried social status. At the bottom of the heap were common laborers, often grizzled old fellows with gnarled hands who spoke broken English. Men of the cast-house crew were big and tough. Millwrights, riggers, and bricklayers were independent characters. Open-hearth workers tended to swagger and show their strength, especially 'second helpers' who performed most of the hard work on the furnace. . . .

"One man I came to know only by sight at Musulin's was a quiet, older man who always sat by himself at a small table next to the wall. He would put his hat on the empty chair and sip one shot of whiskey—no more—while reading a newspaper. I remember someone telling my father, in a low voice that impressed me with a sense of importance, that the lone man was a first helper. He seldom talked to anybody, and the other men kept a respectful distance. Old John Musulin, the white-moustached proprietor, addressed him as 'Mr.' In terms of social status, the first helper was rivaled only by rollers on the blooming and bar mills."

As this marvelous passage suggests, steel in the old days wasn't simply an industry. It was an entire culture, with its own richly embellished social structure. In this book Hoerr shows how this all-American social system produced an utterly disastrous outcome—in which workers didn't work, managers didn't manage, and an entire industry slid year by year toward disaster.

Hoerr's account isn't perfect. It's longer than it needs to be, and tends too often to jump back and forth in time and place. But the book triumphs by never losing sight of the larger story of how the well-intentioned folly of labor and management led to the wave of plant closings in the 1980s.

On the union side the tragedy began with the United Steelworkers' first president, Philip Murray, whose views were conditioned by the bitter struggle to organize low-paid steelworkers in the 1930s. Though he was initially interested in labor-management cooperation schemes, Murray decided that the union's job was to raise wages and fringe benefits, rather than to participate in the larger task of running the enterprise for the good of all.

The union succeeded beyond Murray's wildest dreams. By the early 1980s, American steelworkers were the best-paid industrial workers in the world. From 1967 to 1979, total hourly employment costs in the steel industry rose 180 percent, or an annual rise of 12.1 percent—while the industry's productivity grew barely 2 percent a year. When this cozy, anticompetitive world was punctured by lower-cost foreign steel, the union had only one answer: import barriers.

Steel management comes off even worse than labor in Hoerr's book. Managers made a series of foolish strategic decisions: they continued to build huge open-hearth furnaces in the 1950s, after other countries began to adopt the more modern oxygen-furnace technology; they spent vast sums to produce "pelletized" iron ore from their North American mines (which were no longer producing high-grade ore), rather than import foreign iron ore at about half the cost; and they vastly overestimated (by as much as 100 percent) the demand for American steel during the 1980s.

Worst of all, says Hoerr, was the poisonous relationship that developed between workers and management, especially at the industry's largest company, U.S. Steel. He quotes one steelworker explaining the decline in morale: "In the 1950s, it was a pleasant place to work. . . .The people in the personnel office spent their lives there and knew workers personally." Then, in the 1960s, "the company brought in college grads as supervisors and sometimes paid them more than the general foremen who had come up the old way. This helped destroy working relationships. In the early 1970s, they began hiring attorneys to run personnel services. Most of them used it as a stepping stone and became tough bastards. 'If you want something, arbitrate!' they told us."

In this climate of bitterness and suspicion, workers lost any remaining concern for the efficiency of the enterprise. Recalling his own summer jobs in the mills as a young man, Hoerr notes that "on the night turn, 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., more people may have been sleeping in National Tube than in all the hotels of McKeesport. It was a mark of esteem, the 'macho' thing of the day, to brag about sleeping on company time."

The message of this book (other than the obvious point that wages shouldn't rise faster than productivity) is that the steel industry might have remained competitive if union and management had adopted the sort of cooperative worker-management relationships common in Japan.

But steel's problems may actually reflect too much cooperation between labor and management, rather than too little. This was the industry, after all, where in 1973 labor and management reached the breakthrough Experimental Negotiating Agreement, banning national steel strikes. What ENA really represented was an alliance between labor and management against imports.

Hoerr may also be understating the economic benefits of tough, cost-cutting management. U.S. Steel's approach to labor relations may be neander-

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thal, but the company (and its workforce) will gain significant long-run benefits from management's effort in the 1980s to regain control of its plants. Its steel work force has fallen from more than 100,000 in 1980 to less than 20,000 this year. Meanwhile, productivity has increased so sharply that it now takes just 3.8 man-hours per ton of steel shipped, compared to 10.8 man-hours in 1983.

The sad truth is that by the 1980s it may have been too late for steel to avoid catastrophic cutbacks like those seen at U.S. Steel. With the union's help, Big Steel got enough protection to delay the day of reckoning. But as Hoerr says in his title, "the wolf finally came." □

John Paul Vann's one-man war against the Viet Cong and the Pentagon symbolizes all that was right and wrong with what we did in Vietnam.

A Soldier's Story

by Taylor Branch

On June 16, 1972, Neil Sheehan attended what amounted to a state funeral for the war in Vietnam. The body on the caisson behind the six gray horses belonged to John Paul Vann, killed after nearly a decade of continuous fighting in America's longest siege of blood and belief. His friends, gathered in muted pomp at Arlington Cemetery, spanned the full range of the conflict, from Edward Lansdale, the legendary Ugly American given credit for inventing South Vietnam by clandestine maneuver to Vann's old grenade-throwing companion, Daniel Ellsberg, then on trial for leaking the Pentagon Papers. Vann had promised to testify in support of Ellsberg's sterling character while conspiring simultaneously with officials bent on imprisoning him as a traitor to national security. One of Vann's war-damaged sons dropped half his draft card into his father's grave and then tried to give the other half to President Nixon in the Oval Office. It was one of the countless awkward, incoherent episodes in the struggle over the war's meaning.

As the *New York Times* reporter to whom Ellsberg delivered the Pentagon Papers, Sheehan had acquired some notoriety among the special breed then called the New Journalists—reporters who rebelled against dull objectivity by adopting causes and lively personal styles. Therefore Sheehan's book about Vietnam was news from the moment he undertook to write it. Announcements rolled forth as he joined his contemporaries in promising definitive works on the largest topics of the day: Gay Talese on Sex, David Halberstam on the Press, Tom Wolfe on Space, and Sheehan on Vietnam. Each one of these young authors disappeared into the maw of his subject, but they struggled back one by one, battered if not chastened by the reach of ambition. In the Reagan years only Sheehan was left undelivered. Many observers feared that he, as the most workmanlike and least glittering of these writers, might be forever lost as a casualty of Vietnam introspection. Against this background, Sheehan's book* arrives with the haunting quality of a phoenix.

Taylor Branch is a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly. *His next book,* Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963, *will be published by Simon & Schuster in November.*

**A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam.* Neil Sheehan. *Random House, $24.95.*

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Although it will survive as the insider's account of Vietnam, the work rises above all the sins common to the species. There is no I-told-you-so spirit here. The result is a great saga without hubris.

What humanizes the work is Sheehan's tool of discipline—the life of John Paul Vann as an organizing metaphor for the many layers of pain from Vietnam. Vann's life is arresting enough on the surface. Always at the heart of American turmoil over Vietnam, he amounted to a one-man history running backward: from piercing dissenter against an immoral war policy in 1962, years before most Americans had heard of Vietnam, he became the war's last true believer, slaughtering his way toward victory after even the commanding hawks had given up hope for anything beyond graceful defeat.

Sheehan gradually peels away the facade around Vann's inner life to reveal the naked war biography of a man utterly at odds with his reputation. Vann's courageous dissent turns out to have been a manipulator's lie, and so does his true belief. Sheehan allows the pathos of Vann's background to excuse at least some of his personal cruelties, and he carries through every sordid discovery a fleeting, perverse admiration for Vann as a wild, old-style American hell-bent on shaping the world to fit his character. These qualities account for the positive adjectives "bright" and "shining" in Sheehan's title, which he borrowed from Vann. But the Vann novel and the war narrative mingle inseparably beneath the title word "lie."

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Blunderbuss shelling

Sheehan begins to recreate the war with Vann's arrival in President Kennedy's first major wave of reinforcements. An army lieutenant colonel on volunteer assignment, Vann entered at just the right moment, as usual, and exuded the cocky skills that suited an American soldier of his time: "His body was all lithe, all muscle and bone, and wonderfully quick. . . . At 37 he could still perform a backflip somersault." The war was an adventure then. Only 20 Americans had been killed. In order to conceal the war from American politics, the Kennedy administration banned combat medals for the advisers, as well as flags or other symbols of authority. The task of the U.S. soldiers was to insinuate themselves among the South Vietnamese commanders by persuasion and example. Vann himself excelled in the role. When told that control by the communist guerrillas made a road impassable, his instinctive reaction was to jump alone into a jeep and drive through at high speed. He liked to hover over combat areas, drawing fire while he screamed orders over the radio. The South Vietnamese, he learned in a series of battlefield frustrations, were riddled with corruptions that magnified their fears.

Among other fine points of South Vietnamese bureaucracy, Sheehan reveals that President Diem punished his commanders for engaging in combat on even the most favorable terms, because combat meant accepting casualties, which in turn meant an unhappy army and therefore the threat of a coup. Once, with helpless guerrillas surrounded after a bloody battle, a maddened Vann watched the South Vietnamese commander fritter and delay until the guerrillas escaped, and then the commander ordered a blunderbuss shelling that obliterated civilian adults and babies as well as some friendly soldiers. Vann was among the few Americans to perceive the perverse logic of such engagements: the delay followed Diem's strict rules against the risk of ARVN casualties; the cannonade provided a safe, morale-boosting excercise and some bodies to substitute for the vanished guerrilla platoon.

Vann almost instantly became a lonely voice within the U.S. military. "This is a political war and it calls for discrimination in killing," he said. "The

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best weapon for killing would be a knife. . . .The worst is an airplane. The next worse is artillery. Barring a knife, the best is a rifle—you know who you are killing." To his dismay, Vann found that his U.S. superiors did not want such close-quarters fighting any more than did the South Vietnamese. The last thing the generals wanted to do was to get to know the Vietnamese better or to fight with primitive weapons. They wanted to look like Eisenhower or Patton at the glorious conclusion of World War II, commanding a "machine" that would crush the guerrillas with the most sophisticated methods.

Sheehan abruptly interrupts this ground-level war introduction to insert what amounts to a summary of the Pentagon Papers. In 1967, a disillusioned Robert McNamara commissioned a review of the government's secret archives to answer a number of unsettling questions about the war's origins. The answers, leaked by Ellsberg to Sheehan and *The New York Times* in 1971, shocked the American public with definitive proof that their leaders had persistently misrepresented their motives in Vietnam as well as the prospects for success.

This historical interlude is the first major step into the book as a hall of mirrors. Sheehan, while forthrightly recalling himself as a prowar war correspondent covering Vann, is equally forthright in his conclusion that the secret history of the war made him a fool. The Sheehan who uncovered the Pentagon's secret history nine years later concludes grimly that he and the United States had been "on the wrong side" for many decades. "There was a national revolution going on in Vietnam," he decided, "and the United States was not part of it."

There is nothing remarkable in Sheehan's review of the Pentagon Papers except for the stark challenge posed by his conclusions. The historical explanation for U.S. treatment of Ho Chi Minh lies in the development of the "American imperial system," he writes baldly. He means empire in a Roman sense more than a Marxist one—of geopolitical control through "surrogate" colonial regimes. When President Truman grandly declared in 1945 that the United States would shun "any government imposed on any nation by the force of any foreign power," his target was the Soviet Union's new dominion over white Eastern Europe and most emphatically not the reestablishment of nonwhite colonies by the Allies. A month after Truman's speech, French commanders bombarded free Hanoi with American planes and artillery, killing 6,000 civilians in a single day. This was an unmistakable signal that the French

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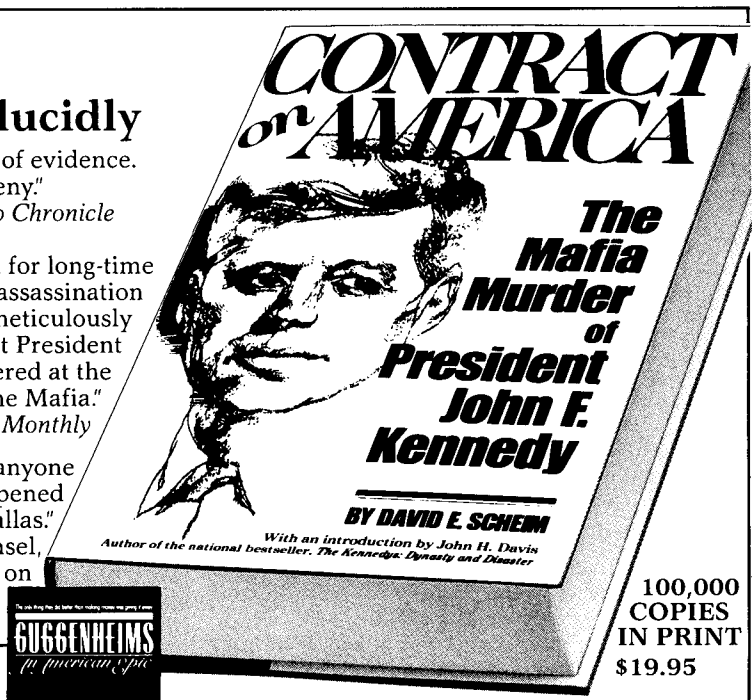

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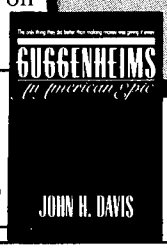

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had American support for a new war to reimpose French sovereignty over Vietnam. From then on, as before, the Vietnamese collaborators in such efforts were Catholic mandarins, Vichy stooges, and unsavory opportunists.

One classic secret memo from the Pentagon Papers dissected the true motives for sending Americans to Vietnam as follows: "70 percent to avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat" (imperial pride); "20 percent to keep SVN. . . from Chinese hands" (geopolitics); and "10 percent to permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life" (democratic idealism). This memo was an effort to be candid about the psychology of commitment. The self-assessment of American motives was probably too cynical, especially early in the war, but it was the truth—not the exaggeration—of consistently unbecoming, un-American attitudes that made the Pentagon Papers an affront to our national identity.

For the most part, Sheehan puts aside the historical perspective when he resumes Vann's war narrative. The effect is disturbing—I think deliberately so. Most readers of the Pentagon Papers section will re-enter Vann's battlefield sympathetic to the communist guerrillas, especially as frugal peasant underdogs against the luxury war machine. Almost inevitably, however, the point of identification drifts back to Vann. This is especially true because Vann seems to have intuited some of the elementary facts of the Pentagon Papers even in 1962. To win, he declared, the U.S. forces needed to study the communists and become more like them—more protective of the peasants and less tolerant of corruption. When his persistent reform efforts met complacency all the way up the chain of command, he did not hesitate to buck the system in the tradition of American heroes. "Halberstam," he told the *New York Times* reporter, "I may be a commissioned officer in the United States Army who's sworn to safeguard classified information, but I'm also an American citizen with a duty to my country. Now listen carefully."

Through the dispatches of Halberstam, Sheehan, and other reporters, Vann told the world of fake operations by the South Vietnamese Army, of phony "body counts" and corruption and doctored intelligence reports. Vann and Halberstam made each other famous as controversial reformers—one as a correspondent and the other a "source" known to insiders. They wanted an honest war because they were idealists who believed that soldiers should serve the weak and deserving—and also because they wanted to win. The challenge to the credibility and rosy assurances of American war policy planted the seeds of later popular dissent. Vann began his protests in February 1963, two years before full-scale American combat units went to Vietnam.

Although merely a colonel, Vann pushed his crusade recklessly through the corridors of the Pentagon back home, buttonholing generals with his alarm until he finally won permission to give a special briefing to the assembled Joint Chiefs of Staff on July 8, 1963. Vann saw this as a life's opportunity to redeem his career and American purpose all at once. He wrote a lecture on "the fundamentals of guerrilla warfare," informing the chiefs that they were creating more enemies by carelessly maiming noncombatants. The preparation went for naught, however, because Vann's bureaucratic foes stopped him minutes before the event. "Looks like you don't brief today, buddy," he was told.

By the time of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution a year later, the war was getting serious, but John Paul Vann was out of uniform. He never delivered his briefing, and in fact retired shortly after being blocked at the door. To his friends, the Army had effectively cashiered him for his dissent, forcing him to resign in protest. Halberstam lionized Vann in print. Sheehan recalls feeling terrible that Vann had sacrificed his chance to make general by taking risks to buttress his news dispatches. "Vann emerged as the one authentic hero of this shameful period of moral and intellectual squalor," Sheehan writes, just before changing the lens of his book once again.

Young girls

"He was illegitimate," writes Sheehan, opening an interlude on Vann's background that is a kind of personalized echo of the earlier chapter on Vietnam history. Once again the theme is deceit. Vann was born Johnny Spry, after his no-account father, who was married to someone else when he abandoned Vann to his mother, Myrtle, a Norfolk, Virginia floozie of Tobacco Road sensibility and barnyard manners. She taunted young Vann about his bastardy. As a boy, he and a friend once peeked into a parked car to behold Myrtle being humped by a local doctor for money. Vann never received a dime of the earnings to offset the added shame of her prostitution, as Myrtle spent all the money on fur coats and jewelry right through the near-starvation of the Depression. The only respectable man who befriended the skinny, trapped kid turned out to be an undercover CIA Arabist who took rat poison when criminal indictments finally caught up with his sideline as a child molester. Vann discovered the body on home leave from the Army.

Vann seldom saw his wife or five children even when home, because he himself pursued women

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almost as relentlessly as Sheehan later pursued the sordid details of his former hero's rotten past. More than one shamelessly deceived young conquest was frightened or desperate enough to ask Mrs. Vann whether it was really true that they were getting divorced so that he could marry her, and if so, why had he not called? She lied under oath to protect Vann from court-martial charges of statutory rape, and Vann completed his evasion of responsibility with strenuous training to get his denials past the Army's lie detector machine. Immensely relieved, Vann told his wife of the lesson he had learned: "Next time I'll make goddamn sure they're old enough."

Blocked from becoming a general by the statutory rape investigation in his records, Vann had arranged a post-retirement job before he ever left for Vietnam in 1962. Why he took such risks there and cultivated the false impression that his career was on the line is a mystery Sheehan does not pretend to fathom, but the wrath of a snookered reporter shines through the discovery.

Spurned by the Army and bored by civilian life, Vann maneuvered his way back to Vietnam as a civilian adviser in 1965. Uncannily, once again, he landed just as President Johnson was sending U.S. soldiers to take over the war from the helpless South Vietnamese. There he kept two permanent concubines in ignorance of one another, resisted the pleas of their Vietnamese fathers to legitimize or free them, and ravaged a procession of young girls on the side.

In his account of this period, Sheehan puts aside his disillusionment over Vann's character, leaving it in the reader's mind with the other filmy overlays of the war. Vann the cruel manipulator retains a keen and brutal sense of truth about the war itself. "We're going to lose because of the moral degeneration in South Vietnam coupled with the excellent discipline of the VC," he predicted in 1965. But for the geopolitical necessity of thwarting the Chinese communists, he wrote later that year, "it would be damned hard to justify our support of the existing government. . . . If I were a lad of 18 faced with the same choice—whether to support the GVN or the NLF—and a member of a rural community, I would surely choose the NLF." Sheehan offers a rare speculation that Vann's haunted childhood allowed him to identify with the poverty and anger of the Vietnamese peasants.

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For whatever reasons, Vann resumed his crusade of dissent and agitation through the reporters. He thought the introduction of large U.S. combat forces was a dreadful mistake. It would make the political war hopeless, he declared, because American troops would prove incapable of distinguishing Vietnamese guerrillas from noncombatant civilians. Attrition, Vann insisted, was the enemy's game, and Westmoreland's territorial blitzes only fed streams of new recruits to the other side. Vann remained a war critic throughout the three big years of troop escalation.

Finally came the Tet Offensive early in 1968, which shattered the credibility and political nerve of the Johnson administration's warmakers. Ironically, this disaster rescued Vann's reputation among the hawks, since he had been predicting such things from the enemy for years. When others turned against the war itself, Vann seized his chance to reform it. His ideas came suddenly into vogue. When the Nixon administration adopted "Vietnamization"—a strategy to return the burden of the fighting to South Vietnam—it amounted to a wholesale adoption of Vann's prescriptions. Old antagonists like Joseph Alsop adopted Vann as a new superpatriot, cured of his former pessimism.

Sheehan argues that the corruptions of Vietnam and of Vann's own life finally swallowed up his professional integrity. Vann's continuing crusades against corruption make it clear that he knew the South Vietnamese government was as bankrupt as ever, but in the heat of his personal success he lost sight of its importance. By then he had grafted himself to Vietnam, perhaps longing to expend his final anger there. "He had finally bent the truth about the war as he had bent other and lesser truths in the past," writes Sheehan. Vann wound up with rank equivalent to a general, the first American civilian ever to hold field command over U.S. military divisions. Against the North Vietnamese spring offensive in 1972, he still amazed hardened soldiers with his kamikaze valor, flying low through machine gun fire to drop ammunition to trapped men. In retreat, he was forced to call in the B-52 air strikes he once scorned. "Outside Kontum, whenever you dropped bombs, you scattered bodies," he boasted, consumed by a warrior's blood rage before the odds finally claimed him in a helicopter crash.

The grease of expansion

Paradoxes abound in Sheehan's tale. The reformers were always concerned about civilians and the legitimacy of the South Vietnamese regime, but they were consistently cutthroat in their quest to purify the war. Halberstam cheered Averill Harriman and Ambassador Lodge as they maneuvered to seize more control of Vietnamese politics by ousting Diem. Vann and other reformers wanted to emulate the Viet Cong, which led to selective assassination campaigns such as the Phoenix program. Meanwhile, traditionalists of the Westmoreland mold preached the anticolonial message that they should not interfere in politics. In fact, they sought to avoid the Vietnamese allies as much as possible while trying to blast the enemy into submission.

Since the war, conservatives have attacked the reformers' chief criticisms of Vietnam. Against the claims of Halberstam and others that the war was not worth winning, or, more strongly, that it was unwinnable, they ask what is the price of a treasured cause, and they call in hindsight for a unity that would have *made* the war winnable. They attack defeatism. In effect, they take advantage of most liberals for refusing to renounce the goal of victory itself. Liberals are afraid to do that, because it would take them close to an endorsement of the other side—the Jane Fonda problem.

Unfortunately, I think, Sheehan overdraws the analogy between Vann and the war, hoping to impeach the war itself with his flaws. Strictly speaking, Vann's character defects never really explain a line of error in Vietnam purpose or strategy. Indeed, as Vietnam recedes into history, liberals and conservatives may both point to Vann as a tragic hero who labored to refine an ugly war to fit a noble cause.

The heart of Sheehan's conflict lies betweeen the good side of Vann and the contrary history that Sheehan discovered in the Pentagon Papers. If Vann's war was just, how did his country come to fight "on the wrong side," as Sheehan painfully concludes? But if the war came from America's "imperial system," how do we account for the sacrifice and idealism of many Americans who supported the war? The beginning of an answer is that the concepts of empire and democracy are not mutually exclusive, as we are conditioned to believe. From the Romans forward, all empires have claimed to spread the benefits of their system. In fact, idealism appears to be a historical requirement of empire, the psychic grease of expansion.

This was especially true of the "American imperial system," as sketched by Sheehan. It was the conception of a liberal, more than a banker or industrialist, born of the Progressive Era's ambition to spread a purified democratic experience around the world. Our problem is that we cannot admit any imperial aspects whatsoever in our purpose, even

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when two million U.S. soldiers were garrisoned around the globe. Lodged in denial, we cannot even begin the essential debate about an American idea of empire and its compatibility with democratic beliefs.

Sheehan leaves many of the war's most difficult issues exposed but unresolved. This is a book of scalding reportage, not interpretation. By capturing within the life of one small obsessive daredevil the essence of something so vast and benumbing as Vietnam, Sheehan has written by far the best single account of the war. My guess is that it will remain so until someone centers a book around a Vietnamese character as resonant as John Paul Vann. Such a feat would add flesh to the missing dimension of the war, while reminding us of the obvious fact that definitive history reads more naturally from the winner's side. Sheehan, to his credit, has stuck with the American losers not only because they are his people but also because there is much to learn when the losing side of a 30-year war is the world's dominant military power. □

He wore silk pajamas and hung out with weirdos. He was often frightened and uncertain, and even Thurgood Marshall called him a "rabble-rouser."

The Martin Luther King No One Knows

by Jason DeParle

On the eighth day of his siege against segregated Birmingham, Martin Luther King Jr. had reached an impasse on both sides of the color line. King began the campaign in the spring of 1963 vowing to put more than a thousand people in Bull Connor's jail. But despite his exhortations, fewer than 150 had come forth. Many blacks were ignoring his call to boycott segregated stores. The local black newspaper called King's demonstrations "wasteful and worthless." White Alabama, meanwhile, had begun to bear down upon him. Knowing that the movement's bail money was running low, the state legislature sent the maximum bail fee rocketing, from $300 to $2,500. A week later, King's bondsman was broke. Without bail money, jailgoers would face six months in prison rather than six days. The trickle of volunteers would run dry.

Nonplused, King convened the cabal of preachers behind the campaign. Only he had the stature to raise the hundreds of thousands of dollars needed. Should he suspend the assault for a fundraising tour? Or step forward to prison as promised? One direction threatened the look of hypocrisy and retreat; the other the uncertain harvest of martyrdom. Polling his lieutenants, King found the demoralized clique as befuddled as he was, and he withdrew into the silence of his bedroom.

When he reemerged a few minutes later, King had swapped his business suit for a denim workshirt and jeans, more fitting for his decision of jail. It was the first time that several of his stunned associates had seen him without a necktie. "I don't know what will happen," he told the hushed room. Daddy King made a final attempt to change his son's mind. "Well you didn't get this nonviolence from me," he huffed. "You must have got it from your Mama."

In the tumult of subsequent days, Harry Belafonte raised the bail money, King scrawled his *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, a thousand schoolchildren filled the police wagons and streets, and segregationists came kneeling to the negotiating table. The photos left behind, of children staring down police

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dogs, are perhaps the most powerful and instructive images of the era, and when they hit the papers, they signaled segregation's doom. Had King kept his tie on, the image left instead at best would have bespoken a man and movement in decline, a well-intentioned leader in over his head.

But King *was* in over his head, at nearly every phase of his extraordinary leadership. He faced not only the twin bulwarks of burning white hate and cool white indifference but black opposition of every color and hue—colleagues whose egos he bruised, rivals who thought he was moving too fast or too slow, and the apathies of rich and poor, mired in their own privileges and miseries. In hindsight, King's achievements seem shrouded in a romantic mist of inevitability. The titles of the leading biographies—*Let the Trumpet Sound*, *Bearing the Cross*, and now *Parting the Waters**—add to the impression of mighty, foreordained triumph. But what's striking about Taylor Branch's terrific book is how mightily *uninevitable* King's victories seemed at the time.

Parting the Waters is both a biography and a wide-angled history of the civil rights movement. As the first volume of a planned two-part work, its 886 pages cover King to 1963, and Branch's meticulous research laces the saga with nuance and irony. There is news in his additions to the story of the FBI's dishonor, but much of the book's joy is simply in the reading. This is a work powered by narrative, and Branch's prose shines: King's aide "jerked and crackled across Shiloh's floor like a downed power line"; against blacks, "justice was a fast waterslide to jail."

Branch doesn't speculate on what the civil rights movement might have looked like without King, but the reader begins to wonder. To be sure, there would have been a movement without him. But it's doubtful that it would have earned its revered place in American mythology. When people take to the streets, even for a righteous cause, there's no guarantee of a happy ending. Certainly the antiwar crusade left no comparable moral glow. In delivering his cause to its mythological resting ground, King was the survivor of a thousand scrapes with doubt and disaster.

'Let me think about it'

There wasn't much in King's childhood that indicated the gestation of great religious or racial leadership. King did have a traumatic encounter with segregation's harsh heart when a six-year-old white friend obeyed his father's command to stop playing with "the nigger kid" King. In a calm voice at the evening dinner table, King told his parents he hated white folks, and Branch argues that the "anger remained buried within him." But the college King was a loafing student with nondescript grades and little interest in campus activism. He was also something of a dandy, both in the clothes he wore and the words he used: when a professor once asked how he was, King responded, "I surmise that my physical equilibrium is organically quiescent."

One odd foreshadowing of things to come lay in King's silent acceptance of his father's frequent whippings. Unlike his brother and sister, King never wept, and he refused to comply when Daddy King devised a new system to have the children take the strap to one another. Though young M.L. would willingly receive the stinging strap, he refused to apply it. King's sponge-like absorption of sorrow and guilt confounded his family again after his brother A.D. slid down a bannister and flattened King's revered grandmother. As the anxious family gathered around the reviving Grandma Williams, M.L. ran upstairs and flung himself from a window.

In graduate school at Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University, King grew more serious in his intellectual habits and showed a particular concern with questions of theodicy: How to reconcile God's love and power with the presence of worldly evil? Searching for an answer, King steeped himself in Gandhi and Niebuhr, but his inquiry remained cerebral rather than activist.

That suited the members of Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church just fine. The status-conscious professionals of King's first church were looking for a pastor not a prophet. Of prophets they had had enough in three years of Vernon Johns, an eminent theologian of unparalleled eccentricity. Though Johns shared the theological stature of eminences like Mordecai Johnson, he possessed none of their polish, arriving for sermons sockless in mud-spattered shoes. He offended half of the Dexter Avenue's mannered membership with his confrontational politics (delivering a protest sermon called "It's Safe to Murder Negroes in Montgomery") and the other half with his barnyard ways (another sermon was entitled "Mud is Basic"). Johns's proud parishioners would often find him peddling fish and watermelons on the street. "I get forty calls about fish for every one about religion," Johns growled in defense and submitted his resignation five times. The distraught deacons finally accepted.

Against his wife's protest, the 25-year-old King left the relative racial enlightenment he had known

**Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963.* Taylor Branch. *Simon & Schuster, $24.95.*

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in Boston (and Atlanta) for the deeper Deep South. Arriving there in 1954, the politics that first concerned him were those of his church, as he sought to establish control over the willful church elders. His first sermon detailed 34 specific demands, including a new electric water fountain. King conquered the deacons quickly but grew bored. A year after his arrival, he was contemplating a deanship at Dillard University in New Orleans when Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her seat.

"Let me think about it and you call me back," King told E.D. Nixon, a local NAACP official, when Nixon asked him to endorse the boycott plans. King was simply one of several dozen ministers who Nixon contacted and by no means the most likely leader. King took control by way of a compromise: more experienced leaders had too many factional enemies. Cynics speculated later that, expecting defeat, the others may have set King up to take the blame.

The boycotters' initial goals appear in retrospect embarrassingly modest. They planned a one-day protest; it stretched on for a year. And they weren't even calling for integration. The boycotters' first demands still had blacks filling the bus from the back and whites sitting in front; they simply asked for more flexibility concerning where the races would meet (so blacks wouldn't have to stand when there were empty white seats).

But once the boycott began, King found himself riding a wave of unimagined power. Like the others, King was stunned to find the buses completely empty as the first morning dawned over the boycott. King's initial inclination, shared by others, was to call it off and use the day's success as a weapon of negotiation, before the boycott inevitably unraveled. But that evening, more than 10,000 people flocked to church to hear King speak, and there was no turning back. In the subsequent months, King was thrown into the role of negotiator, fundraiser, orator, and master logistician. To keep the movement going, he had to coordinate 20,000 carpool rides a day, cajoling the use of almost every black-owned automobile in town. Another 20,000 or so black workers had to walk to work each day, through rain, mud, and winter. "My feets is tired but my soul is rested," one tenacious commuter assured King, providing the movement with its echoing refrain.

King's phone rang incessantly with complaints and occasionally with death threats. After his first arrest (for doing an alleged 30 mph in a 25 mph zone) King trembled in the back of the cruiser. As unfamiliar neighborhoods flew past, he worried that a lynch mob waited ahead. The sight of the garish neon "Montgomery City Jail" filled him first with relief and then again with fear. A bomb exploded outside his home. A shotgun blast ripped through the window. Thurgood Marshall called him a "boy on a man's errand." Daddy King told him to quit; God, speaking to King in his kitchen, told him to persevere.

When a federal court finally struck down Montgomery's segregation edict as unconstitutional, *Time* put a triumphant King on the cover. But up close, King "projected a doe-like vulnerability," Branch says. Meeting later with a wary Harry Belafonte, King told him, "I have no idea where this movement is going."

The pajamas

So much changed so quickly in the American South, due in large part to King himself, that it takes an act of concentration to imagine how bleak things appeared at the time. Bombed churches can seem romantic in retrospect; while they evoke suffering, they sing of righteousness and community as well. But more typically, the hum of gathering violence induced a lonely, nauseous anxiety. King himself came within a breath of death in 1958 when he was stabbed at a book signing party in Harlem. He went to a hospital with the hilt projecting from his chest. The surgeon said a sneeze could have killed him.

The enemies of integration had more than violence in their arsenal. They had formidable legal powers as well, which they could train on the slightest indiscretion. Tennessee officials raided the Highlander Folk School, a training ground for civil disobedience, and found a washtub of iced beer next to a coin jar. They closed the school for selling alcohol without a license, revoked its charter, and auctioned off its land, books, and buildings. King personally discovered the variety of his enemies' weapons following his victory in Montgomery. During the bus boycott, King had handled tens of thousands of dollars and kept few receipts. The state returned the favor by charging him with felony tax evasion, punishable by up to a dozen years in prison. King's own lawyers doubted his innocence and his accountant fleeced him with exorbitant fees. "Never before or after was King so distraught. . ." Branch says. "If convicted. . . he would take to prison the tarnished public image of a lying, greedy, sham preacher. This was everything King had resolved most devoutly not to be. . . ." King was saved from his chaotic financial records by his habit of keeping a precise diary detailing his expenses. Still, the verdict of innocence from an all-white jury struck the judge as "the most surprising thing in my 34 years as a lawyer."

In the aftermath of the boycott victory, King sailed high but in no clear direction. His late-fifties plunge

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into the eccentric world of integrationists brought him face to face with a variety of zealots, and he struggled, Branch says, "to distinguish between kooks and quixotics of promise."

Tactically, King was at an impasse. He traveled at a staggering pace—an estimated 780,000 miles and 200 speeches a year. But facing his audiences, "King himself was surer what they should think than what they should do." He faced the "evangelist's curse" of "tear-streaked faces" but lives left untransformed.

King faced something of an existential impasse, too: who am I? he sometimes wondered. Inspired by the classless unity of the boycott months, King felt divided against himself. When he and Coretta moved back to Atlanta in 1960, King chose a modest house, drove an old car, and irritated Atlanta's black aristocrats with what they perceived as conspicuous humility; yet Coretta brought her cook from Montgomery and moved easily in high society. King wore silk pajamas in jail, vacationed in Martha's Vineyard, and worried that his pleasure in golf was too frivolously bourgeois.

In one post-Montgomery speech, King almost came unhinged, railing against both the poor (they may not be able to buy perfume in Paris, he said, but they could afford a nickel bar of soap) and the educated ("I have met more school teachers recently. . .who wouldn't know a verb if it was as big as that table"). Quick to recognize the significance of the emerging student movement, King was hesitant to share its risks, exploding, "I think I should choose the time and place of my Golgotha." Both King and the students reeled in embarrassed surprise as his Christ complex was laid naked.

As America turned a corner into the 1960s, the quickening pace of the civil rights movement caught almost everyone by surprise, and King was no exception. In Atlanta, the student leaders of a 1961 campaign of sit-ins and boycotts heckled senior black ministers for accepting a settlement that gave the Chamber of Commerce the upper hand. When Daddy King assured the youths, "I've been around this kind of thing for 30 years," a student shot back, "That's what's wrong!" Witnessing his father's berating, King launched into a furious speech on the "cancer of disunity." The thunder of his formidable oratory kept the pact intact, but generational tensions continued to grow.

In the fall of 1961, King encountered opposite generational problems when his attempt to enlist the black National Baptist Convention in the cause of civil rights met a bitter defeat at the annual convention. With King backing a pro-civil rights challenger to the reigning Baptist monarch, J.H. Jackson, a riot

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broke out on the convention floor. The tumult knocked a Jackson supporter from the platform, fracturing his skull, and he slipped into a coma and died. Jackson, his power preserved, denounced King as a "murderer," and it was only the indifference of white media to black preacher politics that kept the ignominious events from wider broadcast.

Controversy within the movement continued to stalk King the following year when the leaders of mass demonstrations in Albany, Georgia sought his help and then blamed him for securing few concessions. Gazing back, King rued his arrival as a fireman, criticized for a blaze he didn't start. It had been six years since Montgomery, and King had been responding more than attacking. Dispatching aides Andrew Young and Wyatt Tee Walker to case Birmingham, King, for the first time, moved into "the conscious, advance selection of strategies and tactics."

They scouted the city with military thoroughness. Walker had phone committee lists, transportation lists, jail lists, mail lists, food provision lists, layout charts of segregated lunch counters, and secret maps for marching there. He knew to the second how long it took old people to march there and how long it took the young. But for all the planning, Birmingham in the end was a cold, faithful plunge. The "mountain of lists and calculations seemed pitifully small next to the core identity of an American city" as fiercely segregated as Birmingham.

In retrospect, the use of children against police dogs and fire hoses seems an act of genius. The so-called complexities of race relations were shrunk to a stunningly simple portrait of might versus right. But had the crazy days of the siege played out in only a slightly different fashion, the image bequeathed would not have been King the Moral Emancipator but King the Cynical Opportunist, dispatching children into riots.

Of Kennedys and Kings

King's fights with the black radicals and white conservatives linger on in memory, but what's easily forgotten, now that King rests secure in the liberal pantheon, are the liberal attacks with which he contended. He achieved acclaim, to be sure, but never the respectability of a Roy Wilkins or Thurgood Marshall, who denounced him as a "first-rate rabble rouser." It was the criticisms of *liberals*, after all, that prompted King's Birmingham letter. From a cell in solitary confinement, King read a smuggled copy of the *Birmingham News*, finding on page two a short story in which his former white allies denounced him, calling the demonstrations "unwise and untimely." Angry and hurt, King began penning his reply on the newspaper itself, twisting his sentences, Branch reports, past pest control ads and the garden club news. "I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait. . .' " King wrote, before launching a sentence of more than 300 words at his liberal critics, beginning with "But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers. . ." and ending with "then you will understand. . . ." Back at the Gaston Motel, King's aides puzzled over his fixation, typing the sheafs of smuggled paper that filtered back for several days and that eventually filled 20 pages. No newspaper mentioned it for a month.

The Kennedys offer a fitting example of the liberal unease with King, alternately bailing him from prison, saving his life from rioters, and tapping his phone. This book brings a sense of irony to the black velvet paintings of King with the two slain Kennedys that decorate the walls of countless homes throughout the South. They were antagonists as much as allies. In further irony, what John Kennedy did share with King was a habit of sexual recklessness that gave J. Edgar Hoover his advantage. By Branch's evidence, Robert Kennedy had vacillated over the idea of bugging King until he learned that Hoover had files on the president's White House affair with Ellen Rometsch, a suspected East German spy. (This echoed a then-unknown 1940s affair between JFK and Inga Arvad, who was similarly deported for reasons of national security.) If Branch's information is correct, this is a sordid matter: The microphones went under King's bed at least in part to silence the FBI about what had taken place in JFK's.

The famed JFK phone call to Coretta during King's imprisonment in the 1960 campaign—which may have tipped the electoral balance Kennedy's way—was placed casually at the urging of Harris Wofford and Sargent Shriver, notoriously suspect in campaign circles for their softness. Robert Kennedy, fearful of alienating southern white voters, threw a fit when he learned of the call—then, inexplicably, called the judge a few days later, gaining King's release.

Even when King was basking in the post-Birmingham glory of the summer of 1963, John Kennedy regarded him as too dangerous to embrace with public zeal. He remained shuttered inside the White House when King marched on Washington, the easier to dissociate himself if the demonstration went awry. And, offering another fitting image of liberal ambivalence toward King, *The Washington Post*'s coverage of the march quoted instead A. Philip Randolph. Readers that day had to turn to *The New York*

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Times to learn that Martin Luther King Jr., had a dream.

The strength and variety of the forces arrayed against him simply make King's achievements that much more impressive. Combined with his own confusions, they restore him from mythology to the more impressive level of man. How, then, did he do it?

The nuances of Branch's study suggest a few wrinkles to the standard stories of King's success. In a movement that had to embrace both the prosperous (white and black) and the dispossessed, King embodied what Branch calls both "the common and the exalted." When King's first cellmates clamored for his help, he joked, "Fellows, before I can assist in getting any of you out, I've got to get my own self out"—combining the folksy "fellows" and "my own self" with the refined "assist."

King's years of theological study had laid the intellectual groundwork for his leadership and his powers of oratory were essential in projecting it, but in another way, it was King's inexperience that gave him an edge. Members of the NAACP had a stake in working through the courts. Rising pooh-bahs in the National Baptist Convention were staked to status anxiety and image inhibitions.

Without such harnesses, King was free to stumble into the power of direct action—or, perhaps more accurately, to allow its power and wisdom to issue forth from him, unthrottled. He was free, then, to welcome paradox—like the strength in nonviolent resistance. (Until King, lawyers had dominated the civil rights movement, and paradox is scarcely a quality dear to the legal mind.) When nonviolence flowed from him, it had an element of existential genius. No more need to wait on courts, lawyers, timing, shifts in your oppressors' heart: Just get off the bus, Gus. Act free and you are free.

America's racial revolution of the past 30 years is a source of both vast hope and a little fear, for it suggests how much and how fast a society can change under the spell of new energy and a few ingenious leaders. In the hands of King, that change made us a better nation than we might ever have hoped. But societies that change fast don't necessarily change well. More optimistically, one wonders who, if any, are the current Kings among us, planting the flag on new moral ground that we'll occupy before we know—that we're not yet even sure is more moral. Perhaps in 30 years, like today's abashed former segregationists, we'll turn to our children and explain that our tolerance of homelessness, or nuclear weapons, or legalized abortion, or the death penalty, or the despair of the black underclass was. . .er. . .well, complicated at the time. □

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WHO'S WHO

George Bush sent his message to the convention of the National Association of Letter Carriers by Federal Express. **Michael Dukakis** sent his by Mailgram. Guess who won the convention's endorsement....

The guilty parties in the selection of **Dan Quayle** as the Republican vice-presidential candidate include **Robert Teeter**, **Roger Ailes**, **Robert M. Kimmitt**, who didn't ask the right questions, and **Nicholas F. Brady**, Reagan's new secretary of the treasury and a close friend of George Bush, who said of Quayle: "He's willing to talk in short sentences and, like President Reagan, will take the risk of oversimplifying things so people can understand them." But the principal villain was George Bush, who was responsible for not giving the rest of his staff a chance to debate Quayle's qualifications.

Kimmitt is the man who failed to get the facts from Dan Quayle. One former associate of Kimmitt tells us that he was not surprised by Kimmitt's insensitivity to influence-pulling. That, he says, is exactly what got Kimmitt his appointment to West Point and his excuse from duty in the Judge Advocate General's department, which was supposed to be his obligation after the military paid for his law school education.

James Baker has tried to suggest to the press that he had nothing to do with Quayle's selection, but Kimmitt was Baker's general counsel at the Treasury Department and is widely suspected of being a Baker-Darman mole during his service on the National Security Council. Some even allege that Baker engineered Kimmitt's role in the vice-presidential screening process to make sure **Jack Kemp** did not survive it....

Speaking of Quayle, **Adam Hochschild**, who held the same kind of public information job in the Reserves as the Republican vice-presidential nominee did in the National Guard, and wrote about his "service" in the July 1971 issue of this magazine, describes his arduous duties: "My main job was being on the staff that produced our unit's internal newsletter—mimeographed once a week on a single sheet of legal-size paper. In the real world this could have been done by one rather sleepy person. In the Reserves, it took a crew of three officers and half a dozen enlisted men."...

In case anyone has forgotten, Quayle's first response to the question at the convention about his motives in joining the Guard remains the best guide to his moral and intellectual qualities. It was: "I did not know in 1969 that I'd be in this room today."...

Elizabeth Dole's modest accomplishments in the realm of automobile safety were rewarded by these words spoken by **Roger Smith**, the head of General Motors, at a reception honoring the Doles in New Orleans: "Mrs. Dole was just a super secretary of Transportation."...

The transition teams for Dukakis and Bush appear to be way ahead of many of their predecessors. **Marcia Hale**, for Dukakis, and **Chase Untermeyer**, for Bush, have already been named and are at work trying to match the right person to the right job. We hope they will heed the counsel we offer beginning on page 29. Unfortunately, our experience suggests that, even if they want to, they won't have the power. Pre-election transition chiefs almost never come from the candidate's first team. The reason is simple. If the election appears to be at all close, the candidate puts all his best people to work on the number one goal—victory at the polls. That is why most administrations botch the transition....

In—*White House:* Senior Domestic Affairs Aide—**Danny L. Crippen.** *Treasury:* Secretary—**Nicholas Brady.** *Agencies and Commissions:* Chairman, Commission on Civil Rights—**William Barclay Allen.** Deputy Administrator, General Services Administration—**Richard A. Austin.** Director, National Cancer Institute—**Alan S. Rabson.** Deputy Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency—**John A. Moore.** Member, Merit Systems Protection Board—**Samuel W. Bogley III.**

Out—*White House:* Senior Domestic Affairs Aide—**Kenneth T. Cribb, Jr.** *Education:* Assistant Secretary of Education—**Chester E. Finn, Jr.** *Treasury:* Assistant Secretary for Domestic Finance—**Charles O. Sethness.** *Health and Human Services:* General Counsel—**Ronald E. Robertson.** *Commerce:* Director of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service of the International Trade Administration—**Alexander Good.** *Agencies and Commissions:* Commissioner, Interstate Commerce Commission—**Malcolm M. B. Sterrett.** Director, National Cancer Institute—**Vincent T. DeVita, Jr.**

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Reel Politics: American Political Movies from *Birth of a Nation* to *Platoon*. Terry Christensen. *Basil Blackwell, $24.95.* Hollywood has always been a hotbed of political activism, from Charlie Chaplin hawking World War I bonds right on through to Oscar-winner Olympia Dukakis stumping for her cousin Michael. But while Hollywood celebrities embrace the rough and tumble of partisan (usually left-of-center) politics, Hollywood movies usually shun ideology and portray the world of politics as grubby and futile. The result, writes Christensen, a professor of political science at San Jose State, is that political movies "keep us passive."

Christensen usefully traces the various ways Hollywood has denigrated politics during the past 80 years. The glorification of the Ku Klux Klan in *Birth of a Nation* is often (and correctly) described as racist, but it also bequeathed the theme that democratic government can't solve real human problems. Better to round up a posse of your own. In the 1930s, film portrayals of leaders like Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt seemed to be celebrating democracy, but in fact these figures were placed on a pedestal above politics, where they commanded blind loyalty from the masses. Meanwhile, Frank Capra and others made films like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, championing the little guy who bucks the system—but, Christensen objects, this implied that "only the personnel, not the institutions, needed changing." Later films like *The Candidate* and *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* abandoned the conceit that even one good man could beat the system.

Obviously, culture influences our politics, but Christensen is too alarmist about the power of movies. And not every film he looks at denigrates democracy as much as he thinks it does. He's especially rough on the one-man-can-make-a-difference theme found in Capra's films, which, far from being a cop-out, strikes me as a cheering affirmation of democracy. In fact, real life tells us that one man often can make a difference. Christensen sneers at the film version of *All the President's Men* for arguing that "brave individuals, a free press, and public opinion can bring the evil men down—the traditional Hollywood view." But that's what really happened!

—*Timothy Noah*

Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical. Janice R. MacKinnon, Stephen R. MacKinnon. *University of California Press, $25.* If it hadn't been for the reissue of her brilliant autobiographical novel, *Daughter of Earth*, in 1973, by The Feminist Press, Agnes Smedley would have been relegated to oblivion by now. Since then, many of her books—especially her reporting on China, which appeared in magazines ranging from *The Nation* to, of all places, *Vogue*—have found their way back into print. Even so, judging by her absence from books such as Radcliffe College's voluminous *Notable American Women*, she seems to be considered neither notable nor quotable by some of those who should admire her most. Smedley ought to be considered one of America's most impressive radicals, that rare breed of activist who moved to the heart of the revolutionary struggle without allowing her judgment to get swept away.

The MacKinnons spent 14 years, two of them in China, rediscovering Smedley's migrations from an impoverished and brutalized childhood in a Colorado mining town in the 1890s to the socialist and feminist circles of Greenwich Village in the 1910s to her years spent reporting on the Chinese revolution. They ask: Was she also running away—from her family, her working-class background, her relationships?

Smedley did not fail to ask these tormenting questions of herself. In the middle of her life they forced her to slow down for several years of psychoanalysis. She wrote *Daughter of Earth* as part of the process. The result is a marriage of personal and political insight. Her title reflects her feeling that she grew up raw, "primitive as a weed," in a family that struggled for survival in lawless western towns and mining camps. One time her father ran a team of horses for six months—only to be taunted by his employer with a "contract" that he had unknow-

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ingly signed that forfeited payment. He expressed his rage in drinking, abusing his wife, and often abandoning his family. In his absence the family was rescued by a feisty aunt who worked as a seamstress and, according to Smedley, sometimes as a prostitute to support them. Smedley's mother died young, from malnutrition and lack of medical care as much as anything else.

This left Smedley with an ambivalent anger at her father that carried over to all men, and an equally ambivalent contempt for the weakness of women. In her first marriage, to a beloved friend and mentor, she sought to avoid sex for months; when she became pregnant she reacted with attempted suicide and finally had an abortion. Her whole life was marked by conflict between her need to be loved and her terror of entrapment.

There was no place where she truly fit in. Smedley groaned in exasperation when idealistic socialists alternately preached to the poor or romanticized the uneducated—she knew that knowledge was liberating. She formed strong personal relationships—and love affairs—with non-Western revolutionaries whose views on women and marriage did not agree with hers. As a foreign correspondent, she reported on the military—but also on sexuality and the family. In China, though she devoted herself to the revolution, she could measure its costs in repression.

If her political commitments were in part formed out of personal need, maybe Smedley found a valuable way to unite her created self with her painful past, healing herself by helping the world.

—Deirdre English

The AIDS Bureaucracy. Sandra Panem. *Harvard University Press, $22.50, cloth; $9.95, paper.* The government's health care bureaucracy couldn't handle AIDS because of structural flaws, Panem writes. Had the flaws not existed, the government could—and would—have contained AIDS.

No one denies imperfections in the Public Health Service, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Health and Human Services. There is, for instance, little systematized cooperation between the epidemiologists at CDC and the research scientists at NIH, and frequently there's a great deal of tension. These government agencies are ill-equipped to react quickly to a health emergency. (There isn't even a clear definition of what constitutes such an emergency.) To solve these and other problems, Panem, a science writer, proposes a number of remedial steps: the establishment of an AIDS "czar"; "generous and centralized finances"; central oversight of research; long-term strategic planning, and others.

There's nothing wrong with any of these recommendations. But even if they were all instituted today, they wouldn't solve the problem. In focusing on bureaucratic snags, Panem misses a larger point. It wasn't solely because of a flawed bureaucracy that the Reagan administration bungled AIDS. The administration failed to really mobilize against AIDS because in the early 1980s, when the disease's spread could have been slowed, *it didn't want to.* To begin with, the administration was cutting funds for health services in general. And with the possible exception of its surgeon general, C. Everett Koop, the administration never had Mother Teresa-like sympathy for the homosexuals and drug addicts most stricken by AIDS.

It's a mistake to write of the health system, as Panem does, as if it functions in a vacuum. Bureaucracies are inherently political. They need leadership to move. With AIDS, they didn't get it.

—Richard Blow

Why Americans Don't Vote. Frances Fox Piven, Richard A. Cloward. *Pantheon, $19.95.* In 1963, President John F. Kennedy established a commission to recommend ways to enhance voter participation. Its findings, reported shortly after his untimely death, urged among other things: the abolition of poll taxes and literacy tests; the enfranchisement of blacks and 18- to 20-year-old youths; a shortened period between the close of registration and election day; mail registration; bilingual ballots; and various voter outreach programs. With one in-

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consequential exception, all of the commission's 18 recommendations have been adopted in whole or in part. Yet over the past 25 years, voter turnout has declined by nearly 20 percent in presidential elections—and more than 20 percent in mid-term elections—so that the United States now has the lowest rate of voter participation of any democracy in the world.

Enter Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, arguing that the principal obstacles to enhanced voter turnout and to the mobilization of the American underclass are registration laws and administrative procedures. This assertion flies in the face of:

►Data that shows that in North Dakota, which has no registration barriers because it has no personal registration, the decline in voter participation in the last decade has been substantially greater than that of the nation as a whole, and that in Wisconsin and Minnesota, after an initial surge in voter participation following the adoption of election day registration in those states, voter participation has been declining more steeply than in the rest of the nation.

►Election results that show a sharp increase in turnout in 1982 (as compared to 1978), despite no increase in registration, and a sharp decrease in turnout in 1986 (as compared to 1982), despite a sharp increase in registration.

Something about this book reminds one of the sign, "My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts." None of this is to suggest that voting laws and procedures do not pose obstacles for some citizens and should not be liberalized. But the authors' monomaniacal concern with registration law obscures important issues they themselves raise. For instance, they convincingly refute the idea that nonvoting is symptomatic of a satisfied society. "No one has satisfactorily explained," they argue, "why the politics of happiness is so consistently concentrated among the least well off."

The authors correctly attribute part of the decline to the increasing disinclination of both parties to mobilize nonvoters and particularly that of the Democratic party to appeal to the nonvoting underclass. And they accurately attribute the Democratic disinclination to the bureaucratization, ossification, and gerontofication of the American labor movement, which has in recent years sought to defend its diminishing position rather than expand its base.

In a larger sense, any book that attempts to explain why Americans don't vote and does not address a more adversarial attitude between citizen and government; a more self-seeking attitude on the part of the individual citizen; mass media that increasingly sees its role, to paraphrase Neil Postman, as amusing Americans to death; weak misaligned parties without a mass message; a dearth of national direction; a decline in the quality of education in general and civic education in particular; the role of message-obfuscating political consultants; an erosion of responsive government and its ability to anticipate and address long-term problems; a decline in standards of probity of government leaders; the increasing costs of campaigns and concomitant increasing dependence on moneyed interests; and the increasing complexity of the average citizen's life, is simply not a serious attempt to understand the problem.

—Curtis B. Gans

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Presidential Debates: Their Power, Problems, and Promise. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, David S. Birdsell. *Oxford University Press, $19.95.* Presidential campaign debates are like White House press conferences—they're not much, but they're all we've got. We learn more from what the candidates say inadvertently in debates than from what they say intentionally. But what do we learn? That's hard to tell. I was a panelist in the first Reagan-Mondale debate in 1984, and I asked both candidates about taxes and the role of religion in public life. Their answers were lifeless snippets from their campaign speeches or full-blown efforts at saying nothing and thus avoiding a gaffe. The only moment of spontaneity came when Reagan was asked why,

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as a professed Christian, he never goes to church. Reagan said any church he attended might be blown up (presumably by terrorists), and he didn't want to inconvenience the parishioners. An interesting answer, but what did it reveal about Reagan's character or his ability to govern effectively? Four years later, I still haven't figured that out.

In this brief (256 pages) book, Jamieson and Birdsell give a nice rundown of how presidential debates evolved and how they should be changed: the press panel should be scrapped in favor of a conversational format with a single moderator; debates should be limited to narrow topics; visual aids such as maps should be utilized. I agree on all counts. Candidates who get by on superficial knowledge of many issues but mastery of none might be exposed. If not, they'd at least have to respond to their opponent's zingers.

But let's not get our hopes up. The real problem with presidential debates is the public and the press. Most folks scarcely follow campaigns and thus have only the most shallow grasp of the issues. They watch debates and usually end up thinking better of both candidates. Then the press steps in and declares a winner based on who generated the best "sound bytes" for TV news shows. Within three days, the public knuckles under and accepts the press verdict. This happened in 1976 when the press wildly exaggerated the significance of Ford's blooper about Poland and in 1984 when reporters gave Reagan too much credit for a canned joke about Mondale's "youth and inexperience." Changing the debate format won't alter this sad performance.

—*Fred Barnes*

Letters to Olga. Vaclav Havel. *Knopf, $25.* Having been but a baby dissident myself, I never did get to experience the formative hells of a political prison in a workers' paradise. I have no doubt that given time (or *the times*, those wild mid-sixties) I would have been in an excellent position to do so. In Romania, where I was born, bred, and precociously thought myself a poet, I had been headed that way, along with other

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writers of my generation, ever since the first thaw of 1963, when Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech let some savage ghosts out of the bag of authorized history, including the unspeakable Gulag. It was a heady time, filled with the beat of that *esprit du temps* that saw young people from Bucharest to Detroit shed futures planned by Central Committees in the East or social convention in the West to plunge headlong into the unknown. The hair curtain suddenly became more important than the iron one. Alexander Solzhenitsyn's severity gave way to the avant-garde; Milan Kundera's wonderful art is hidden in that moment in the mid-sixties.

That brief abandon came to an end in Central Europe in the Prague Spring of 1968. A case can be made that the Chicago Democratic National Convention of that year performed the same service for our Western brothers and sisters. But there are differences. The smashing of the counterculture in the United States and elsewhere was mostly a war of images, with a few violent exceptions. For Americans, it was still possible to agitate against the state after 1968; it was just more difficult to be heard. The termination of the Prague spring of 1968 was for Central Europe the distinct end of a great adventure.

From 1968 until 1979, the date of Vaclav Havel's last arrest, paranoia and repression entrenched themselves in the hungover survivors of the sixties. Many writers and intellectuals chose exile to the West or made their apologies and crawled back into the still-warm cells of the Party. But hardier souls had also been forged during the golden era of dissidence, people who refused to abandon the struggle for democracy and human values. They found themselves locked in a fight with the security apparatus, a body notoriously lacking in subtlety and humor.

Havel, author of this collection of prison letters to his wife, was a central figure of the gradually darkening years of the seventies. In 1978 he cofounded (with Jiri Hajek) Charter 77, an organization formed to further democracy in Czechoslovakia, including monitoring the cases of people indicted and imprisoned for their political views. The Charter's typewritten reports, documenting human rights violations, were widely circulated and carefully read. The philosophical basis of Charter 77 (so named for the number of people who signed it) was an amalgam of the best of sixties ideals: nonviolence, openness, tolerance, democratic participation.

In 1979, six signatories of Charter 77 were brought to trial in Prague. Havel received four-and-a-half years in prison for disseminating unacceptable writings. (At the time of his arrest, Havel was a well-known playwright who had received world-wide attention for *The Garden Party*, *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration*, and *The Memorandum*, plays that captured the imagination of the Czech public with their savage dissection of a hopelessly bureaucratic society where the absurd is part of everyday life. *The Memorandum* was produced by Joseph Papp at the New York Shakespeare Festival in 1968 and won an Obie.) He served most of his term but was abruptly released in January 1984 while he was ill with a raging fever. Not long after, he emigrated to Canada, and he now lives in Toronto.

Letters to Olga contains the majority of his prison letters to his wife. Some were censored and never delivered. The letters are numbered and dated, to give notice to prison censors that record-keeping was going on. Taken as a whole, they help elevate the abstraction "dissident," or even "dissident writer," to the status of being human, with all its incumbent flaws.

Vaclav and Olga's relationship (her letters are not published here) is not likely to please feminists. It is in many ways a typical sixties relationship, in which a so-called progressive husband grudgingly makes room for the personality of his spouse. The endless instructions, both particular and general, are often embarrassing: "Be cheerful, level-headed, healthy, and sociable, do your tasks conscientiously, keep track of what goes on, don't let trivial matters upset you, think about me and keep your fingers crossed for me, try to get along well

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"STOP THEM DAMN PICTURES"

That's what "Boss" Tweed demanded when he saw the handwriting on the Hall (Tammany, that is). But the pictures didn't stop. "Boss" Tweed met his maker in the Ludlow Street Jail and Thomas Nast put bitingly eloquent political cartoons squarely and permanently in the middle of American political life. Tweed aside, we think Emerson had it right when he said, *"Caricatures are often the truest history of the times."*

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with everyone." Elsewhere, he instructs Olga on how to do her hair.

But as the letters go on, the relationship changes. The irritations of the first letters, which must have been the tenor of their pre-prison relationship, give way to respect and even affection. I was reminded that the feminist critique in the United States began with an analysis of what was wrong with precisely such committed couples as Vaclav and Olga. I couldn't make up my mind whether I liked the writer of these letters enough to go on, until I became slowly captivated by the story of Vaclav's mind as it rediscovers itself in prison.

Introspection is simple self-defense in prison, and Havel examines himself rigorously, chronicling and classifying his every mood. When the news of John Lennon's assassination reaches him, he experiences that chill of recognition familiar to all of us for whom the music and style of the sixties were an intrinsic part of our thinking. Havel compares Lennon's death to John Kennedy's and finds that he is moved more profoundly by it because Lennon is more intimately a part of himself. In Prague, for example, there is a John Lennon wall, white-washed by the authorities many times over, that nonetheless continues to be scrawled with expressions of freedom in many languages. Isolated by prison, Havel wonders whether Lennon's death is also affecting others as strongly, and is soon confirmed in that belief by an article forwarded to him by Olga. Meditating on the meaning of Lennon's death, he has a generational epiphany. "I do not believe that certain values and ideals of the sixties have been discredited as empty illusions and mistakes. . . ," he writes, "though it is a history of repressions, murders, stupidities, wars, and violence, it is at the same time a history of magnificent dreams, longings, and ideals."

Having come to intellectual maturity during the decade that ended in the Prague Spring, Havel, like his contempory Milan Kundera and many others, is a firm believer in certain givens of that generation: the world is ruled by fearful old men whose vested interests lie in protecting a corrupt power structure; youth and love are the chief enemies of this grotesque tribe of bureaucratic vampires. This core of ideas was held passionately across the borders East and West. The difference—the great difference!—was that the Eastern and Central European youth did not have the luxury of drifting about the world experiencing it. Forced to confront political constraints in every corner of their lives, they became aware of the way in which words like "peace" and "love" turn into their opposites and how a society allegedly dedicated to utopia is in fact a prison.

Born among the shards of post-war Europe under the totalitarian absence of thought imposed by rigid Marxist revision, the children of the sixties availed themselves of all culture. Havel's eclecticism is not solely philosophical. We hear him discoursing seemingly at random on every book that falls into his hands, whether it is a Soviet history book or an old French novel. Kafka's name comes up quite often, and not accidentally. To Central European writers, Czechs in particular, Kafka was not a writer of allegories or parables. His writings are "truth," pure and simple. Kafka described for all times our bureaucratic nightmare.

Vaclav Havel's letters deliver the reader to a pivotal moment in the history of Central Europe. In what seems like only a few moments before talk of glasnost became commonplace, a voice from the inside is speaking clearly and intelligently about personal and political freedom. What happens next in Gorbachev's experiment depends very much on how freely voices like Havel's will be permitted to speak. As we've seen from recent events in Poland, demands for change may still exceed the goodwill of the Party. At those times it is useful to remember—particularly in the beguiled and easily charmed West—that true change cannot come from the top. Democracy has to unsettle society to much deeper levels. It probably won't be necessary for the whole of Czech or Russian society to be unsettled to the depths to which Havel unsettles his mind. But the honest exploratory spirit that landed him in prison and that produced this book ought to be held exemplary.

—Andrei Codrescu

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